

Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz, 1955-2023

The Man and Friend who was also an Artist.



Photo: printed in Glasstire 2005.

By Susan Morales Guerra

I met Ángel because he fell in love with one of my oldest and dearest friends, Rolando Briseño, also an artist. At first, he lived with Rolando in NYC, he worked side by side with Rolando, he married him and created a permanent home together when they moved to San Antonio in 1995. Here, Ángel brought his Puerto Rican soul and over the years, organically “sculpted” a home with Rolando, where they shared a family of beloved dogs, gardens, their art studios, old world Mexican / Latin music, chismes, Mexican and Chicano art, collections of natural artifacts, books, the sounds and scents of cheerful cocktails, laughter, serious political conversations, spontaneous intellectual explorations amid colorful fruits and vegetables. He welcomed us Chicano, and all friends, made dinners for us and used time to know us individually, even portraited some of us, he welcomed us into his heart. **Corazon. Cariñoso.**

Rolando asked if I would write a tribute to Ángel and I was honored and of course wanted to do so. He was my friend, married to one of my best friends, and I was grieving without my San Antonio community around me. I began browsing through web pages of all his artwork, the self-portraits; to “see” what he expressed there. As I browsed, I heard his voice, the tenor tones of vanilla and cinnamon, sometimes deep and heavy, tuned with elation, excitement, engagement, anger, frustration. His voice I heard speaking through the layers of his painted emotion and experienced knowing which I discovered in his work. **Sabiduría. Voz.**

I looked into his eyes as he painted them in his self-portraits. His sacred soul emerged, as if saying, “...there is more to say, take me along, I still want to do more, my hands and mind do not want to rest...” Destiny gave him sixty-seven years on earth. **Tristeza. Gratitud.**

To be in the room with Ángel was a visceral experience for me, an acute awareness of breath and blood flow. I sometimes felt shy, as he seemed to see my vulnerabilities, my insecurities. I felt

shy because he also saw my potentials, and he gave me

his admiration, support and encouragement through playful dares, friendly nudging. “You *are* an artist, Susan!” I was nervous by his saying that, that perhaps he believed in something in me I could not live up to. Even on the dance floor, my clumsy feet, he said--- “Ven! Oh, I know you’ve got this in you. Un poco mas suave”. With his face full of pleasure and enjoyment, he taught me the Danzón and *his* way to Salsa. Subtle, sensuous and soulful, movement from within instead of flailing limbs and broad steps. *Elegante*, reminiscent of part of how he lived his life and painted. **Sensualidad. Sensibilidad.**



Angel & Rolando, Photo Credit: Steve Bennet SA Express-News

To look at his paintings and artwork, to peer into his self-portraits, is a dive into lessons from history, cultural history, art history. It is to sense oneself both alone and within the whole of humanity. Our frailties, our beauty, our sensitivity, our wisdom are there. “Now you see me”.

Frailties which are self-imposed, superimposed and as consequence of how our individual psyche responds to the social-political positioning Latinos are born into. I see these in how he paints the textures of skin, the shape of lips and mouth, the color of muscle. And the eyes; there are looks of confusion, anger, perplexity, confrontation, tenderness, and boldness. The self-portraits, as he had pointed out in interviews, reflect a spectrum of personal and public experience of what Ángel perceived as colonial, Latino life.

Into the many images he has painted, I am moved by the juxtapositions of the world upon our hearts, the hearts of our people **Solidaridad**.

What a gift Ángel he has given us. The holistic imaginative and intellectual work which Ángel has given the world through his creativity has come at a cost, has cost him pain and energy each time he delved into the work of imagination, painting, creating, and meeting the historical and psychological ghosts which many of us never have wanted to move towards. **Coraje. Espíritu.**

Ángel dared to move towards humanity's collective experiences of both oppression and creativity onto the canvas and into his design of his public art. He did this through complex compositions which give homage to laborers, to women who live and identify courageously and shamelessly in spite of the burden of misogyny, to the gay communities who know the scars of a life underground due to fear and hateful judgements. He exposed some of our crosses, so that life can learn to be lived with heads up, healed hearts and conscious, informed minds. **Pasión. Conciencia.**

Thank you, Ángel, the man and friend who was also an artist. Now that he has passed, I could only peer into his paintings online, though many I have seen "live", to close in on his expression, breathe in what I perceived. This has only been worth a fragment of what it meant to know Angel as my friend; alive, vital, witty, bright; through our experiences together at the times we had together. **Amor. Amistad.**

Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz. Presente! Qué descanses en Paz. C/S

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Goddess Triptych Series: Yamaya, collection of the artist.



Con Todo Mi Corazón), 1997, collection of Dr. Raphael and Sandra Guerra



Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz. Angel The Butterfly, 2004



Photo Ángel Rodríguez-Díaz. Detail from untitled self-portrait 2017.



End of the Journey, July 1996, collection of Dr. Raphael and Sandra Guerra