

EXHIBITION REVIEW OF

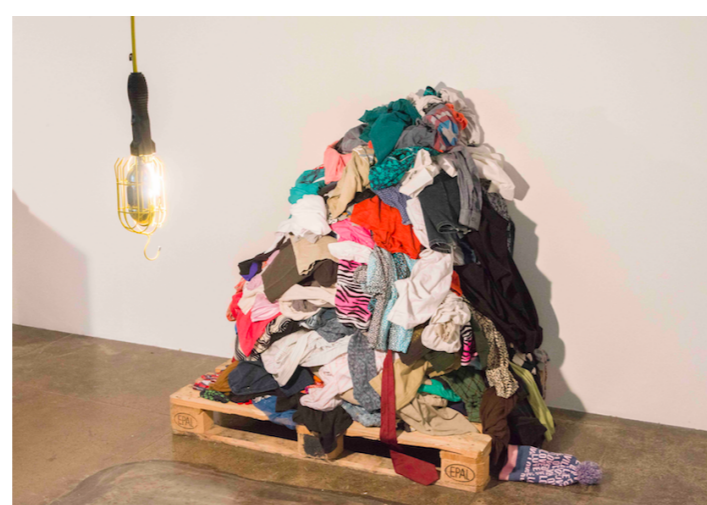
FRANCIS ALMENDÁREZ
"Rhythm and (p)leisure"
at ArtPace, San Antonio

BY REYES RAMIREZ



Houston-based artist Francis Almendárez creates intimacy between art and audience through immersive experiences informed by love and vulnerability. His latest installation at Artpace in San Antonio, as part of their Artist-in-Residence program, solidifies Francis as an important emerging artist who builds grander and more gorgeous work with each exhibition.

I first saw Francis' work in Houston. He used bulky CRT monitors to display presentations of food and buildings; you could sit in a rocking chair, put on headphones and hear Francis speak softly. In a performance, Francis recited a monologue while massaging Vicks VapoRub onto his mother's hands as she sat in that rocking chair.



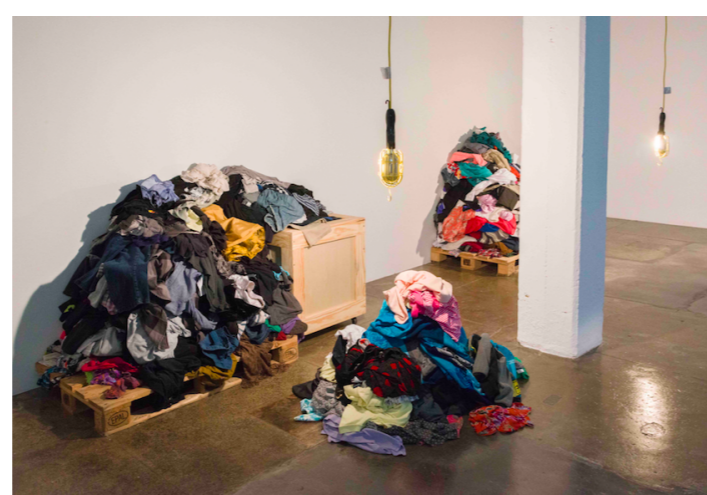
That tenderness scared me because I didn't know how to be this vulnerable in my work, if I've ever wanted to be so. Francis told me it took a lot of time and effort to get his practice there. That's what's endearing about his art: you learn to love alongside him. This in mind, I opened the double doors at the rear of Artpace that contained "rhythm and (p)leisure" like a locket.

Several things hit me when I entered the darkened room. The smell of wood arose from pallets and crates that were laid about with garments folded neatly atop, some still attached with thrift store price tags.



Sound shouts from videos playing on two opposing projectors and several of those CRT monitors. The projected videos depict progressing footages of: street drummers playing for passing dancers and bystanders; food cart vendors preparing tortillas; a family working a plot of land; a man making a counterfeit Nike shoe; a woman sweeping; matriarchs preparing meats. They are all artists, too. The videos on the CRT monitors are either zoomed into different aspects of the projected images (such as the hands of the tortilla maker kneading the masa) or provide alternate angles of the same scene(s).

The videos' glow dreamily illuminate the space. At the far end are two hanging light bulbs that shine like a miner's lantern on two pallets carrying piled clothes. Francis notes that all the clothes will continue their journey after the deinstallation of the exhibition to whatever fate has culled for them. Such is this life.



There's peace in this darkness that's lulled by the everyday lives of Central Americans. It's as if being in someone's brain, the videos acting as the mind's eye of whatever that person's thinking. Here, the brain belongs to Francis and the attention to detail shows how much love he has for the process of work and leisure that workers of the world engage in. I, son of an immigrant housekeeper, wanted to sit down on a pallet, fold clothes, and watch people laugh and dance in the night heat, comforted by their joy, to know that this is what we know to do to celebrate life and each other in the face of capitalism, exploitation, and violence. I'm sure that's what Francis intended, so I can love these forms of rebellion in the same way he does.

Read more about Francis's work [here](#).

YES Contemporary thanks Reyes Ramirez for contributing this review.

Images: Originally commissioned and produced by Artpace San Antonio. Photo credit Seale Photography Studios