

Capital City Arts Initiative

The Capital City Arts Initiative [CCAI] is delighted to present, Saludos Amigos, *an exhibition by Justin Favela, at the CCAI Courthouse Gallery from October 4, 2019 – January 29, 2020. CCAI extends its sincere appreciations to the artist, the Carson City Courthouse, and to all those involved with the exhibition. In addition, CCAI thanks our commissioned writer, Emmanuel Ortega, who provided the following essay. Note: an extended piece by Ortega is available at www.ccainv/programs/essays. Essay images are from previous Favela exhibitions.*

Saludos Amigos: An Introduction

Upon first inspection of any of Justin Favela's paper murals, the visitor may be overwhelmed by the ways in which the artist utilizes color and paper. However, beyond the surface of all this material lies a critical re-understanding of Latinx identity politics. His large-scale paper murals are from diverse sources such as the nineteenth-century Mexican landscape painter José María Velasco and Walt Disney's movie illustrations. His "piñata" technique and use of colored paper as a medium to recreate such iconic images reverses notions of "popular art" to challenge Latin America's art historical canon. Furthermore, his intention is not only to express the joy through the materials of his murals, but also, he aims to disrupt common perceptions of various Latin American countries as "exotic" destinations.

In this installation, he takes iconographic cues from the movies produced by Disney for the Good Neighbor Policy era to construct abstract works of color and paper. Ultimately, Favela has integrated several different types of landscapes in order to create a mural installation that celebrates his Guatemalan and Mexican heritage while simultaneously highlighting the history of the ways in which Latinx peoples have been perceived for centuries.



Lowrider Piñata, 2014, cardboard, paper, and glue, 5'x19.5'x6.5'; "*State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now*", Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR. Photo: Mikayla Whitmore.

In 1941, amidst fears that various countries in Latin America would side with the Nazi effort to win the war, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Inter-American Affairs (CIAA), as part of the U.S. Department of State.[1] These efforts were later to be known as FDR's Good Neighbor Policy. Amongst several strategies aimed at solidifying political relations with Latin America, the U.S. government invested in the production of Hollywood movies with the goal of combating some of the negative stereotypes against Latinos that existed in

1 Dale Adams, "Saludos Amigos: Hollywood and FDR's Good Neighbor Policy," (Quarterly Review of Film and Video, 24:3, 2007), 289-295, DOI: 10.1080/10509200500486395



U.S. popular imagery. As noted by Dale Adams in "Saludos Amigos: Hollywood and FDR's God Neighbor Policy," the Policy years, between 1933-1945, created hundreds of musicals, animated movies, and even westerns where the image of Latin America and Latinos in general attempted to be uplifted, promoting thus a good relationship with all those countries portrayed on the silver screen.[2]

"Perhaps the two most influential and successful films of the era were Walt Disney's *Saludos Amigos* in 1943 and *Three Caballeros* in 1945."[3] As part of his research for the creation of these films, Walt Disney traveled to Central and South America with a group of artists and illustrators. His trips were later documented in a short film titled *South of the Border with Walt Disney* (1942). Disney's visit to Latin America, "resulted in a better understanding of the art, music, folklore, and humor of our Latin American friends and a wealth of material for future cartoons."[4] Yet the cartoon characters that came out of their travels reiterated the stereotypes that the "Good Neighbor" program was in theory attempting to erase.



Fridalandia, 2017, paper, glue, and found objects. Installation at the Denver Art Museum. Photo: Mikayla Whitmore.

Examples of the characters include a Brazilian armadillo, a Peruvian llama that comes to life to the sound of an Andean kid's flute, a *Gauchito* from Uruguay that travels with his *burrito* (little donkey), a flying *sarape* (or an orientalist Mexican magical flying carpet), and Joe Carioca, a spiffy dressed Brazilian parrot that became a central character of several movies of the Good Neighbor era. The "exotic" nature of South American flowers and the "picturesque" and "colorful" landscapes of these countries, made their way into future Disney films. In this mural Justin Favela goes beyond the stereotypes by abstracting the myths created by Disney.

Favela's dazzling abstract landscapes defy picturesque depictions of Latin America and instead offer a pixelated version of the images he appropriates from Disney.

In other words, the artist avoids making art that accommodates the established order and instead

2 Adams, 293
3 Adams, 293
4 Walt Disney, South of the Border with Walt Disney (DVD. Directed by Jack Cutting and Norman Ferguson. Los Angeles: Disney, 1942).



offers dizzying color compositions. This installation, with its various parts and styles taken together, has the quality of rich Mexican church altarpieces that seem poised to crumble. His murals are meant to awe the beholder, but most importantly, encourage further examination and critical contemplation.



Popocatepetl e Iztaccihuatl vistos desde Atlixco, after Jose Maria Velasco, 2016, paper and glue, 64"x 82", photo: Mikayla Whitmore.

Emmanuel Ortega, Ph.D.
Chicago, IL
September, 2019





Artist Justin Favela

This exhibition is supported by a Challenge America grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The artist and CCAI thank the NEA for its generous support of this project.

The Capital City Arts Initiative [CCAI] is funded by the John and Grace Nauman Foundation, Carson City Cultural Commission, Nevada Arts Council, Nevada Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities, NV Energy Foundation, Southwest Gas Corporation Foundation, U.S. Bank Foundation, and its members.

Capital City Arts Initiative
CCAINV.org