

**MADART
SUPPORTS
ARTISTS IN OUR
COMMUNITY,
BRINGS ART
INTO OUR LIVES
IN UNEXPECTED
WAYS, AND
CREATES
COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT IN
THE ARTS.**





GEORGE RODRIGUEZ

REFLECT & GATHER

PREVIOUS:
INSTALLATION VIEW OF
**REFLECT AND GATHER: TILED
ROOM, SCULPTURAL PLAZA'S
FLOWER-FILLED PLANTERS, AND
INSTRUMENTAL DIVIDE**

ABOVE:
INSTALLATION VIEW OF
**INSTRUMENTAL DIVIDE'S
BASSIST, 1 OF A 9-PIECE
COLLECTION**

APRIL 8 - MAY 18, 2019

FORWARD

In April 2019, George Rodriguez, a Texas-born, Seattle-based ceramicist, moved into MadArt Studio and began the construction of his long developing exhibition, *Reflect and Gather*. At a glance, this exhibition is a combination of Rodriguez's 2009 University of Washington's MFA thesis project—a 9-piece mariachi band titled *Instrumental Divide*—and a collection of newly created works that include three inhabitable rooms joined by a central sculptural plaza. A deeper look reveals a practice rooted in cultural inquiry, in which mythology, color composition, design, ornamentation, architectural form and texture combine to reflect the varied influences of Rodriguez's own heritage and time spent abroad. Embracing and expanding his object-based practice, the works in *Reflect and Gather* embody Rodriguez's distinctive style, but in new forms.

The defining work of *Reflect and Gather* is a series of captivating and immersive rooms. Two out of three of these structures are cloaked in thousands of decorative relief tiles, while the third is made entirely of malleable, wet clay. Each structure can be seen as a unique collaboration

between Rodriguez and another party. Most notably is the colorful, tile-encased room which was realized through the help of many volunteer contributors. Starting in early January 2019 and leading up to the installation, Rodriguez created a space for making and community building by opening up his Ballard-based studio to various groups. During this time, participants contributed to the project by hand-pressing and painting the over 2,000 decorative tiles incorporated in the hand-made tiled room. The tiles are unique in their variance of color, texture, and pattern, and the individual participant's contribution to the larger project can be clearly identified within this space. The second tiled room was done in partnership with MudShark Studios, a small-batch ceramic manufacturing outfit in Portland, Oregon. These 2,000 tiles were produced through a RAM press mold, which creates consistency and uniformity in the tiles' display. With capacity for only a few visitors at a time, each of these tiled rooms creates an unexpectedly meditative space by stimulating viewers' visual faculty in an overabundance of ornamentation. Lastly, an ongoing form of collaboration is the wet clay



ABOVE:
TEXTURED SURFACE OF THE EVOLVING
COMMUNITY MURAL IN **REFLECT AND
GATHER'S** WET CLAY ROOM

room, which is a new exploration for Rodriguez. He wanted to create a space where visitors could actively participate over the course of the exhibition. Serving as a community mural, the malleable wet clay room has evolved as viewers enter into the space, leaving evidence of their physical movement and intention within the surface of the floor and walls.

To further enliven MadArt Studio, Rodriguez chose to incorporate, *Instrumental Divide*, 2009. These larger-than-life 9 mariachi sculptures

command the viewing area by creating a celebratory atmosphere. A reminder of his Mexican-American heritage, this work was originally created in response to Rodriguez's experience acclimating to a new city in pursuit of an MFA in ceramics at the University of Washington in Seattle. The sculptures embody nostalgia and represent the challenges and uncertainty experienced when re-defining one's physical community.

At MadArt a founding objective is to create opportunities for community involvement in the arts. As I look back

and think about initial conversations around this exhibition, community involvement as a theme has been at the forefront. It wasn't until I started working more closely with Rodriguez that I realized the place and importance community occupied in his practice, and the many forms in which it takes shape. Whether it is through celebration of diversity seen in his physical objects or the shaping of space for direct interpersonal engagement, community is an underlying foundation. It is through the inclusion of others and the importance placed on community that MadArt has witnessed something truly special happen through the production of *Reflect and Gather*. The generosity of Rodriguez's spirit and practice in combination with his artistic vision, facilitated a space for art-based community engagement, strengthening, and building. Further, the collective effort represented in this exhibition is a testament to what can be accomplished through generosity and space making. ♦

EMILY KELLY
MADART STUDIO DIRECTOR





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PREVIOUS:
STREET-FACING INSTALLATION
VIEW OF THE BACKSIDES OF
INSTRUMENTAL DIVIDE

ABOVE:
DETAILS OF **INSTRUMENTAL**
DIVIDE

IN CONVERSATION WITH GEORGE RODRIGUEZ

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE, REFLECT & GATHER?

I wanted to create an environment where the public could congregate (gather) as a community then take space as individuals to decompress (reflect) on their experiences. The gathering space is represented as a courtyard with benches and planters. It's inviting and comfortable to encourage dialogue between attendees. It's the park where one can socialize and know that we are part of a multitude of people. The tiled rooms are overly decorated on the floor, walls, and ceilings to blanket whoever enters the space. This creates a sanctuary where the individual can be free in the midst of adornment. A space to practice self care and listen to our own thoughts.

WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR REFLECT & GATHER?

I've been wanting to enter one of

my sculptures for several years now. I was very interested in being surrounded by ornamentation and an overabundance of textures. I also lean heavily on my community and feel grateful that I have their support. This show is a thank you note to the people that have impacted my life in the last decade. I wanted to provide them with a space that was beautiful and theirs to inhabit. As new visitors come into the installation, I hope they also feel comfortable and welcome.

THIS EXHIBITION INCLUDES YOUR UW MFA THESIS PROJECT, **INSTRUMENTAL DIVIDE.** CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS WORK, AND WHY YOU CHOSE TO INCLUDE IT IS YOUR MADART STUDIO SHOW.

Instrumental Divide is a sculpture about community and where we place ourselves in relationship to those communities. As viewers, we can stand outside of different communities or we can choose to enter that unknown space. This piece was originally created when I was feeling homesick and struggling to find my place in Seattle and the arts community. A decade after making *Instrumental Divide*, I have found a core community of creatives. The mariachi brings a sense of celebration to any party and by sprinkling the

musicians around the gallery space, they brighten up the room.

**HOW ABOUT MADART
STUDIO, HOW HAS
WORKING THERE
CHALLENGED YOU AS AN
ARTIST?**

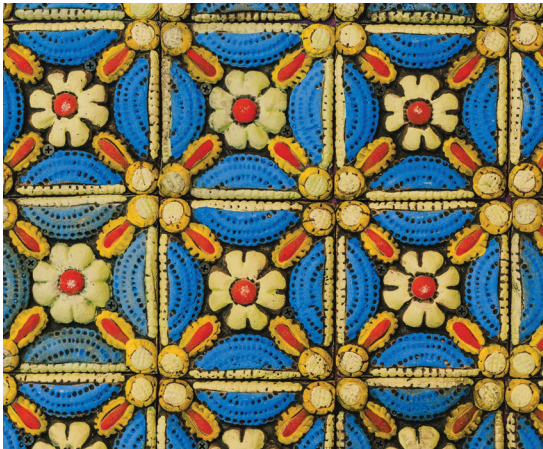
I've thoroughly enjoyed working at MadArt. Before entering the space I was nervous and excited to see if my ideas would hold attention in such a commanding space. When I finally stepped foot into the studio it felt so comfortable and inviting. As an object maker, it was exhilarating to interpret my art into installation sculpture and when the rooms started taking shape it was a deep exhale. MadArt has really given me the courage and freedom to dive into a project that is larger than anything I've done before. Larger in scale, but also in ambition.

**WHAT DO YOU HOPE
VISITORS WILL TAKE AWAY
FROM REFLECT AND
GATHER?**

I hope visitors will leave the installation with a smile on their face and a little less weight on their shoulders. ❖



LEFT:
INSTALLATION VIEW
LOOKING INTO THE
HAND-TILED ROOM



LEFT:
RODRIGUEZ
EMBRACES TEXTURE
AS A CENTRAL
ELEMENT IN HIS
WORK. THESE
IMAGES DISPLAY A
SAMPLING OF THE
VARIOUS TEXTURED
SURFACES INCLUDED
IN **REFLECT AND
GATHER**

RIGHT:
RODRIGUEZ
PREPARING TILES IN
HIS **BALLARD STUDIO**

Born and raised in El Paso, TX, George Rodriguez creates humorous decorative ceramic sculpture addressing his identity and community. He received a BFA in ceramics from the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP) and is a graduate of the University of Washington's MFA program. He is the 2016 recipient of the Museum of Northwest Art's Luminaries' Patti Warashina Award for Emerging Artists and was featured in a solo show at the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art in 2018. Rodriguez was a participant in MadArt's first exhibition in 2009, The Window Art Project, and his work can also be found in the permanent collection of the National Mexican Museum of Art in Chicago. He continues to draw on his travels to 26 countries on three continents backed by the Bonderman Travel Fellowship, which he was awarded in 2010. Expanding on his studies of global culture and ceremony, Rodriguez seeks to bridge his Chicano heritage with Thai, Peruvian, Bolivian, Mongolian, Egyptian, Taiwanese, and Indonesian civilization and mythology. His work is a celebration of the individual against the backdrop of community, the modern world against the backdrop of the ancient. Rodriguez is represented by Foster/White Gallery in Seattle, WA.



**SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE HANDS THAT HELPED MAKE
THIS EXHIBITION POSSIBLE:**

PROJECT ASSISTANTS:

GUSTAVO MARTINEZ

LIZ WIEGAND

**AS PART OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THIS EXHIBITION, RODRIGUEZ
INVITED INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS TO PARTICIPATE
BY HAND-PAINTING AND PRESSING DECORATIVE RELIEF TILES
IN HIS BALLARD-BASED STUDIO. SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE
PARTICIPATING MEMBERS OF THE FOLLOWING GROUPS, AS WELL AS
MANY FRIENDS AND FAMILY THAT HELPED TO REALIZE
THIS EXHIBITION:**

**PRATT FINE ARTS CENTER
FOSTER WHITE GALLERY
POTTERY NORTHWEST
SEWARD PARK CLAY STUDIO
PRINCETON ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
&
FRIENDS AND FAMILY**

**ADDITIONAL THANKS TO CLAY ART CENTER IN TACOMA,
WASHINGTON FOR THEIR MATERIAL CONTRIBUTION WHICH
SAW THIS PROJECT THROUGH AND TO MUDSHARK STUDIOS IN
PORTLAND, OREGON FOR THEIR EXPERTISE IN THE PRODUCTION OF
THE RAM PRESSED TILES INCLUDED IN **REFLECT AND GATHER**.**

ALL CATALOG PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES HARNOIS

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PROVIDED BY MADART.**

**MADART IS A CONTEMPORARY ART ORGANIZATION LOCATED
IN SEATTLE, WASHINGTON THAT SERVES AS A CATALYST FOR
CREATING NEW, LARGE-SCALE, SITE-RESPONSIVE WORKS BY
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