

Conversations with Jana Cothren



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Today we'd like to introduce you to Jana Cothren owner and director of Cothren Contemporary HTX.

Hi Jana, so excited to have you with us today. What can you tell us about your story?

Well, I first became involved in the HTX art community in 2000. In 2008, I became an Art Advisor. 10 years later in 2018, I moved to San Antonio and opened my first art space. I moved back to Houston and in June 2021, I opened Cothren Contemporary HTX. My journey began in February 2000, as I was incredibly fortunate to meet my dear friend, the esteemed contemporary artist McKay Otto. He was the first person to notice I had an eye for art, and by the end of 2000, I knew most of the top contemporary gallerists in the city. The first Houston gallery I ever set foot in was Moody Gallery run by Betty Moody. I was so fortunate to step into such a welcoming and accessible art environment on my first art outing. Two gallerists that almost immediately took me under their wing and nurtured my eye were Anya Tish of Anya Tish Gallery and Kathleen James of James Gallery. I think it is worth noting that these women fully exemplify the art of women nurturing other women toward success. Anya continues to be a mentor and friend. I affectionately refer to her as my "Art Mama", and she calls me the "Art Auntie". Needless to say, they saw something in me that I had yet to recognize in myself, at such a young age, and encouraged me to continue on my art path. Before closing her gallery and moving to Nogales, AZ in 2001, with her sculptor/photographer husband Gary, Kathleen summoned me to her gallery in Hawthorne Heights to bid me adieu and charge me with having a gallery someday. And, here we are.

My brief art adventure, living in San Antonio, a hotbed of contemporary abstract artists, brought me into contact with the non-profit art incubators ArtPace and Blue Star Contemporary, as well as Patricia Ruiz Healy of Ruiz Healy Art and Susan Oliver Heard of Cinnabar Gallery. I fell in love with the city, the art community and the possibility of impacting the growth of the Contemporary Abstract and conceptual art genre in that city. It was not lost on me, that the three major Houston based Latin artists I could name off the top of my head, were originally from San Antonio. In a city with a 43.7% Latin population, I was astounded, and still am, at the lack of representation in Houston, and Texas in general.

So again, here we are.

In June 2021 I hosted my first opening, after discovering Select Studios on Peerspace. What first was intended as a pop up, "LatinX Abstract: 713 to 210", a collaboration with seven SATX artists in HTX, turned into what is now Cothren Contemporary HTX. I will celebrate the one year anniversary of my gallery, thanks to the kindness and vision of Select Studios owner and photographer, Arthur Garcia. Three days after meeting to discuss a pop up in his space, he asked if I would like to have a gallery space. We gave it a trial run, the first opening was a hit, and again, here we are!

The most important cog in the wheel of any art community is the artists themselves. There is NO art without the artists. Art is a reflection that mirrors our community, our world, our culture and our values. So, what does it say about the visibility and invisibility of the LatinX and Latin American population when there is so little representation in the art world, and specifically in

Houston? My vision is to be the cog in this wheel that offers a seat at the table for LatinX, Latin American and women artists from all backgrounds, to truly reflect the culture of our predominantly Latin city, and in doing so elevate art that is a reflection of our city, our state and our nation.

I have the good fortune to collaborate with and commend four CCHTX represented contemporary artists, of Mexican and Mexican-American descent, whose works were recently selected by the Museum of Fine Arts Houston for participation in their Latin American Experience Weekend, celebrating the twentieth anniversary of their Latin American Art Department. Cande Aguilar, Jesse Amado, Jorge Puro and Veronica Gaona are important art voices, mapping out the changing landscape of abstract contemporary art in Texas. Aguilar aka BarrioPOP and Amado were recently featured in the exhibition, Dos Manos Dos Toques. This show has received rave reviews and there are still some works available for viewing by appointment. Our current exhibition, Paisajes Impermanentes/ Impermanent Landscapes, features two Houston based artists with borderland roots, Interdisciplinary artist Veronica Gaona and fine art print maker Aldo Fabian Ramos. Consisting of monoprint/silkscreen prints, sculpture and photography, their works weave a tale of how great beauty can arise from the ashes of great pain and great loss. It is a joyful celebration of the possibility for renewal and resilience, and is available for viewing at 5016 Allen Street, through June 25.

Owning a gallery is not as simple as showing and selling art. It is an opportunity to affect the cultural landscape of my city. That being said, I am only one of many arts innovators that are elevating LatinX and Latin American art in Houston. My hope is for these leaders to collaborate and form a cohesive community working toward our common goal. Latin art community organizers and innovators such as artists and advocates Henry Sanchez and Angel Quezada of HALA (Houston Alliance of LatinX Artists), artist Geraldina Interiano Wise, the chairwoman and force behind AALMAHH, advocating for a Houston Museum of Latin Visual Arts and Culture, curator Rosa Ana Orlando, who was instrumental in co-curating the critically acclaimed "Withstand: LatinX Art in Times of Conflict" at the Houston Holocaust Museum, and Guggenheim Fellow poet, UH professor and LatinX arts writer and historian, Roberto Tejada, are on the forefront of this cultural revolution toward more visibility.

Reflecting back on this history, one thing is obvious, I did not arrive here alone. It takes an openly inclusive community to support one another's dreams, and I do believe that the Houston art community is unique in the way we elevate one another to achieve our dreams. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for Houston, especially as we continue to open art doors that more accurately reflect all of the beautiful colors and cultures of our great city.

I'm sure you wouldn't say it's been obstacle free, but so far would you say the journey has been a fairly smooth road?

I see obstacles as opportunities. The pandemic, for example, has given me the opportunity, to meet with collectors and arts innovators one on one by appointment, deepening relationships that most likely would have taken longer to develop, had we not had so much time on our hands and the opportunity to slow down and really learn from one another's visions. The gallery is fast becoming known for my private collectors bespoke art happy hours, featuring tequila cocktails and vibrant art conversations. Would I say it has been fairly smooth, no. But, it is how you navigate the roadblocks that will determine how you arrive at your destination, and we are on the road to success!

How do you define success?

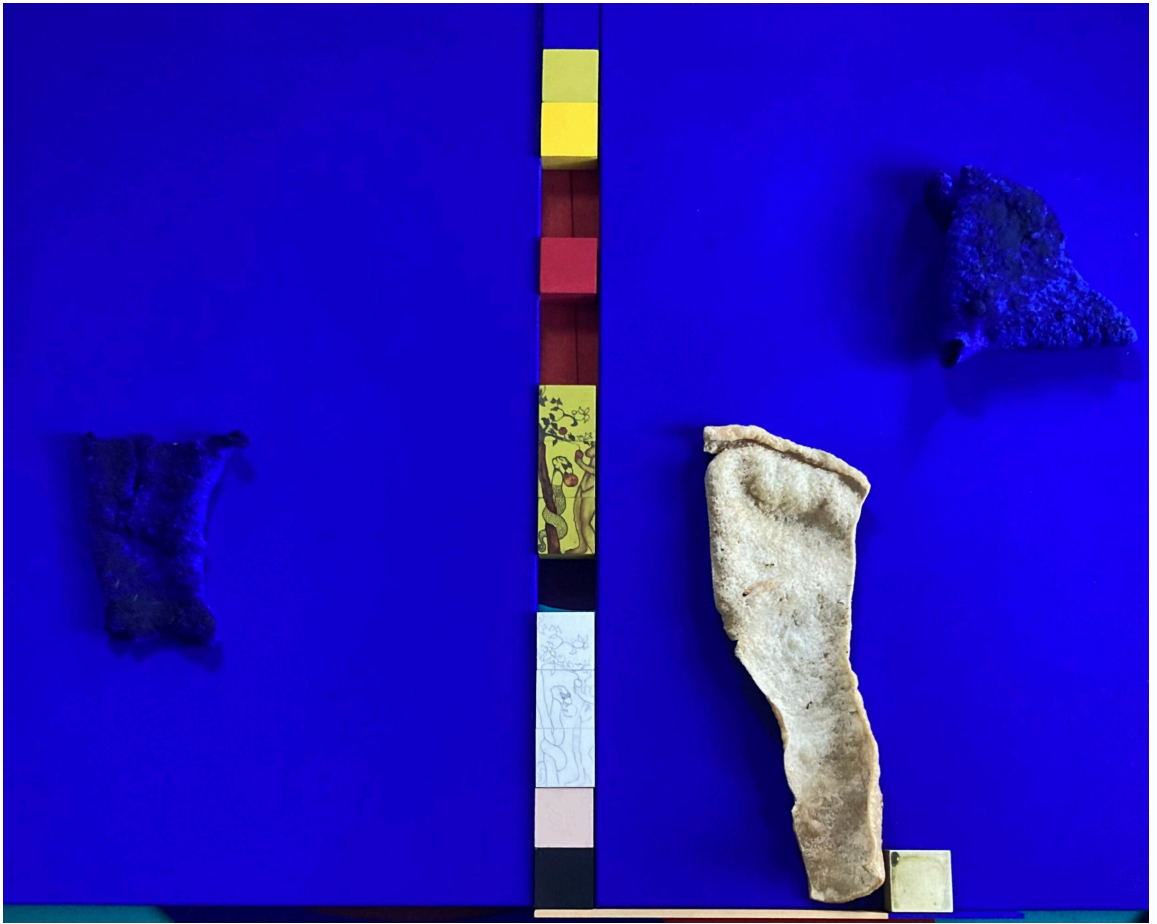
I define success in a myriad of ways. I do not believe it can be narrowed down to just one aspect. However, what makes me feel the most successful is seeing that the artists I collaborate with and the collectors that support all of us in our endeavors, are happy when the deal goes down. It is a joyful celebration every time. Nurturing artists and facilitating their growth beyond the gallery itself, is the greatest of all rewards. I like to say that "Art love IS the best love", and I feel it every time the community comes together to collaborate, and celebrate art and the artists that are such a vital and necessary part of our cultural landscape.

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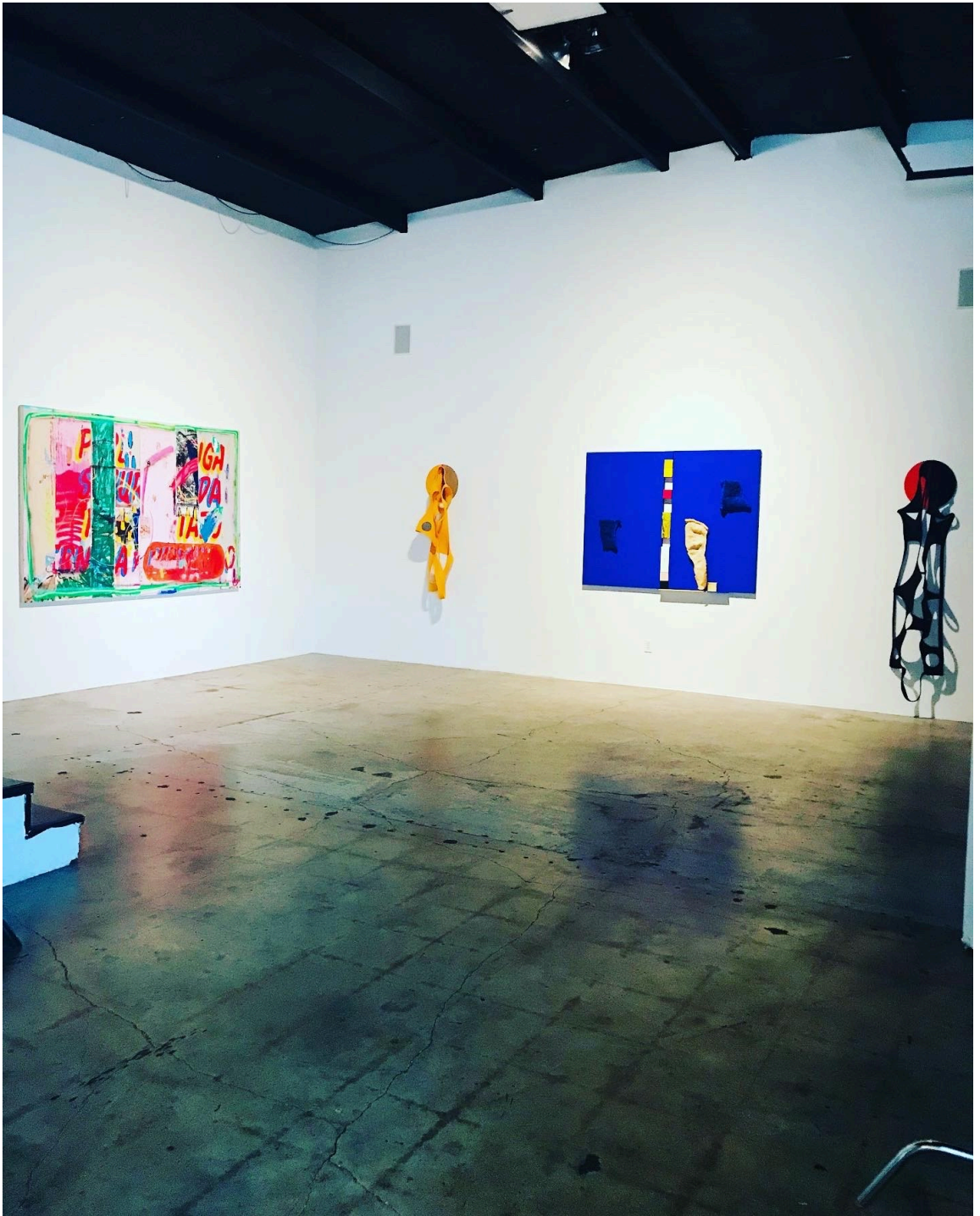










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