

INTERNATIONAL

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

*in the co-confluence of
the civilizations in the americas*

Adrian Aguilera

Spring 2021 International Artist-in-Residence

In residence January 25, 2021–March 27, 2021

Exhibitions on view March 25, 2021–May 16, 2021

ABOUT THE ARTIST

A native of Monterrey, México (b. 1981), Adrian Aguilera currently lives and works in Austin, Texas. Working with a variety of mediums that include sculpture, text-based work, print media, video, and installations, Aguilera researches the intrinsic essence that resides in objects. With an interest in scientific observation, cultural history, and social issues, the artist's work addresses our relationship with the physical and cultural spaces in which we (co)exist. He holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts (2004) from Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, México. He has exhibited both nationally and internationally at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Fusebox Festival, Blanton Museum of Art, and George Washington Carver Museum in Austin; as well as the Instituto Cultural de México in Paris, France. Aguilera is also an active member of the Austin-based contemporary arts collaborative platform Black Mountain Project.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Austin-based artist Adrian Aguilera's video and mixed-media installation *in the co-confluence of the civilizations in the americas* proposes an ontological and physical exploration of the invisible labor of Brown and Black (BIPOC) workers and other immigrant groups. Though rarely seen or acknowledged, their work may take place early in the morning or late at night, but all of our lived experiences are directly affected by their labor, which contributes to multiple economies as well as the spaces in which we coexist, despite its invisibility.

Aguilera's two-channel video *untitled (civil twilights, 13:03:21)* is informed by French filmmaker Marguerite Duras's 1978 *Les Mains négatives* ("Negative Hands") in which Duras shot a sequence of deserted Parisian streets from night to dawn. In her film, a poetic voiceover describes handprints (from 12,000 to 17,000 years old) discovered in the Magdalenian caves of Western Europe. In a similar spirit, Aguilera's video beckons the viewer to ride along during two daily periods of civil twilight—the early morning and the late afternoon—when most essential laborers are already working, and other workers are returning home. In remembrance of Breonna Taylor's senseless murder in 2020, *untitled (civil twilights, 13:03:21)* was filmed around the San Antonio National Cemetery and city cemeteries on the anniversary of her death, March 13. Taylor was herself an essential worker who was murdered by police in her home while sleeping.

Nearby in the gallery, two columns of gold and blue acrylic, *untitled (study of longing for landscape)*, reveal subtle, transferred images representative of indigenous civilizations in the Americas, but also images of plants, fossils, and rock art. This work resembles the Mexican Muralism tradition in which narrative public murals convey humanitarian, social, and political themes to the masses. Aguilera's *untitled (study of longing for landscape)* draws inspiration from Juan O'Gorman's mural *Confluence of Civilizations in the Americas*, originally commissioned for the 1968 HemisFair in San Antonio, which was organized around the same titular theme. Aguilera expanded the idea using images representative of myriad peoples and cultures and the mixing of civilizations and knowledges in the Americas.

Taking the notion of invisible labor a step further, Aguilera's *untitled (ephemeralization of an economy)* presents an institutional bank check floating above a pedestal. The check was a reimbursement to the artist for some painting he had done in the gallery. For that work, he hired an immigrant day laborer (Fernando, a native of the northern Mexican state of Coahuila) who was without a Social Security number (SSN) and therefore paid in cash. This piece highlights the tension between what some would deem a more civilized economic arrangement (involving SSNs, W-9s, and business-issued checks) and an entirely unacknowledged informal economy. The work's title refers to "ephemeralization," a term coined by R. Buckminster Fuller, which suggests, in his words, the ability of technological or human advancement to do "more and more with less and less until eventually you can do everything with nothing." Fuller's vision of ephemeralization conceived of ever-increasing standards of living for an ever-growing population, despite finite resources.

Continuing his practice of revealing histories, the text-based work *untitled (in the co-confluence of the civilizations in the americas)* was made using a vinyl mask and the artist painstakingly carving out the letters of his exhibition title. In doing so, he reveals the strata of histories of the gallery space. Each layer represents the presence of not just another artist but the physical labor of numerous unnamed art handlers and contract workers over the course of as many as 25 years, revealed in the pentimenti of each layer made visible. The title of this work, as well as Aguilera's exhibition, is taken from Juan O'Gorman's mosaic mural in San Antonio, which features images of the biblical Adam and Eve, European immigrants, and representations of Central and South American indigenous groups.

Aguilera's temperature-sensitive painting *untitled (34.1°C = 93.4°F to 300°C = 572°F)*, activated by human touch (as well as performed by the artist), shifts across a color spectrum indicating increases and decreases in body temperature. The lower end of the temperature range represents a body at rest, while the higher end represents a body at work as required for labor work. The painting casually rests on two gallery bolsters, typically used during installation, to highlight the artifice of the transition between an exhibition of art being installed and when it is ready and open for public viewing or interaction. The systems for reading temperature indicated in the painting's title bring to consciousness another way of understanding the energy that labor work requires.

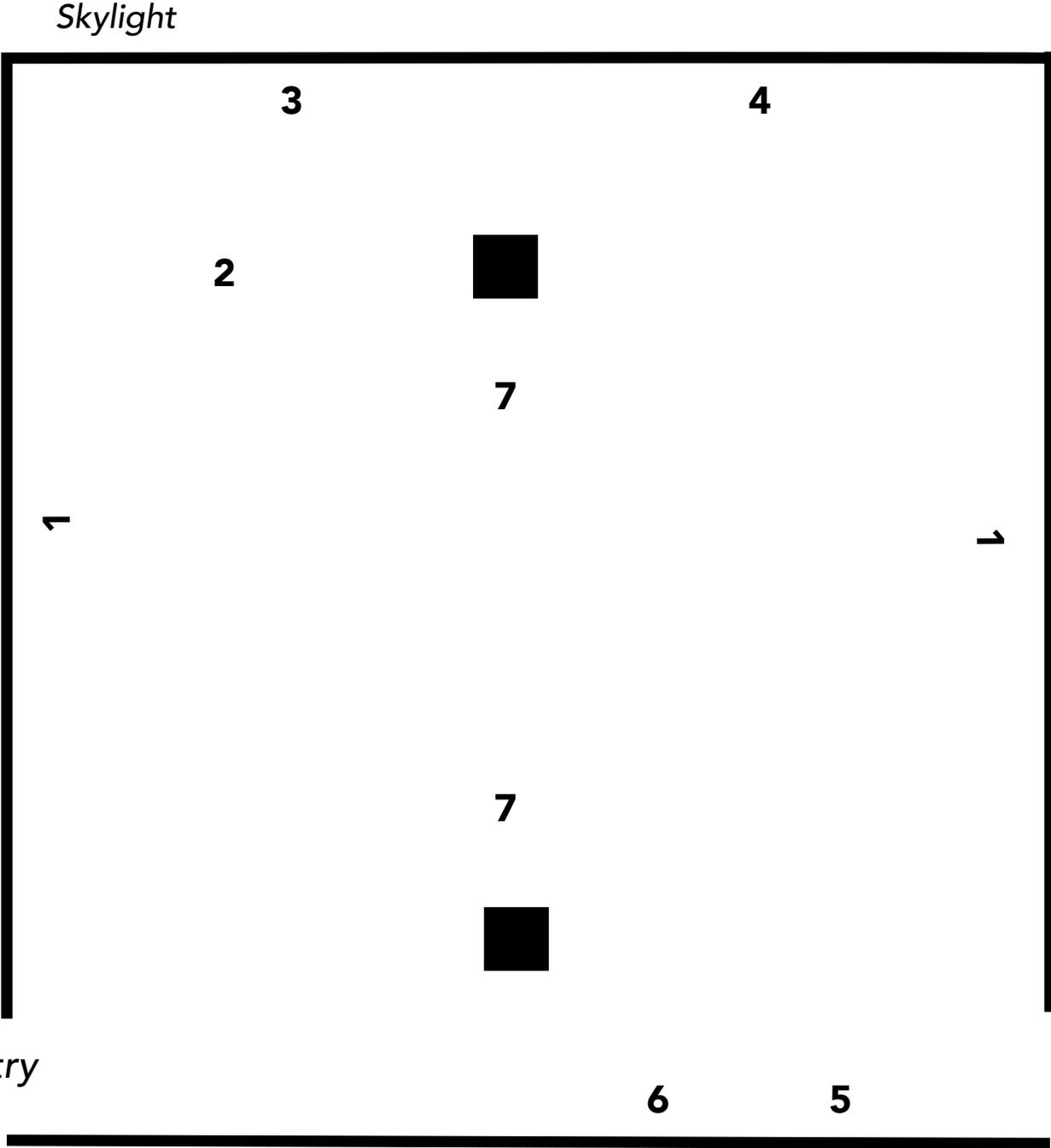
Interested in the conceptual aspect of Minimalist Art, Aguilera looks to artist Robert Ryman—a former guard at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and a self-taught artist whose education consisted of his seven years as an essential worker at MoMA—as a reference for *untitled (surface unveil, white #1 and #2)*, two works made with white conforming vinyl. At Artpace, Aguilera has applied a square of white vinyl in the center of the gallery's north wall, as well as on a perimeter middle column. His choice of a square shape, as in Ryman's work, avoids the conventional suggestion of representing windows and landscapes. The white color choice reinforces a conviction that every visible detail of the wall surface contributes to the viewer's experience of it and the ambient light. The vinyl hugs the rough textured surfaces of the cinder block on the wall and the fired brick column, architectural features from different time periods in the Artpace building's history. Once applied, with great attention to detail, the vinyl picks up imperfections and minutiae from each surface. Those details are themselves evidence of the hands of past builders and contractors, likely BIPOC workers. In Aguilera's work, materials, real or artificial light, and the space in which the work is exhibited and exists become the mediums for conveying his ideas about history, knowledge, and people.

Each of the works produced for *in the co-confluence of the civilizations in the americas* exposes viewers, through diverse materials, to the absence/presence of invisible labor upon which our society so closely relies.

WORKS LIST (clockwise from entrance)

- 1 *untitled (civil twilights, 13:03:21)***
Two-channel HD video in color with audio
TRT: 26:33 mins.
- 2 *untitled (ephemeralization of an economy)***
Compensation for skilled immigrant labor
and floating device
- 3 *untitled (in the co-confluence of the civilizations in the americas)***
High relief on gypsum wall with vinyl mask
- 4 *untitled (34.1°C = 93.4°F to 300°C = 572°F)***
Temperature sensitive painting and bolsters
- 5 *untitled (surface unveil, white #1)***
Low relief print from vinyl on cinder
block wall
- 6 *untitled (surface unveil, white #2)***
Low relief print from vinyl on cinder
block wall
- 7 *untitled (study of longing for landscape)***
Etchings on gold and blue acrylic sheets

GALLERY MAP



Please refer to separate Works List for titles and materials.

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

Since 1995, Artpace has welcomed more than 251 artists through its renowned International Artist-in-Residence program. Annually, Artpace hosts three residencies, which each feature one Texas-based artist, one national artist, and one international artist, who are selected by a notable guest curator. Each eight-week residency culminates in a two-month exhibition on site. The mission of this program is to provide artists with unparalleled resources that allow them to experiment with new ideas and take provocative risks.

ABOUT ARTPACE

Artpace San Antonio is a nonprofit residency program which supports regional, national, and international artists in the creation of new art.

As a catalyst for artistic expression, we engage local communities with global art practices and experiences.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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