

A THOUSAND WORDS

The Power of Pictures in Books



CURATED BY XELENA GONZÁLEZ
and KIM GARZA CHBEIR

A THOUSAND WORDS



CURATED BY XELENA GONZÁLEZ
and KIM GARZA CHBEIR



ARTS &
CULTURE



Contents

This publication accompanies the exhibition *A Thousand Words: The Power of Pictures in Books*, curated by Xelena González & Kim Garza Chbeir and presented by the City of San Antonio Department of Arts & Culture at Centro de Artes, San Antonio, Texas, March 27 – August 17, 2025.

Printing of this publication was made possible by the generous support of The NRP Group.

© The artists, authors, and the City of San Antonio.

Exhibition Photography: Francisco F. Cortés

Catalogue Layout and Design by: Paloma Cortez

All rights reserved.



101 S. Santa Rosa
San Antonio, TX 78207
SA.gov/Arts
#CentroDeArtesSA @GetCreativeSA

6

FOREWORD

Krystal Jones, Executive Director
City of San Antonio
Department of Arts & Culture

Yadhira Lozano, Chair
Centro de Artes Committee

8

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Xelena González

13

ABOUT THE CURATORS

14

ARTISTS AND SELECTED WORKS

34

THE EXHIBITION

36

ABOUT CENTRO DE ARTES

Foreword

Vibrant and warm illustrations leapt from the pages of picture books in *A Thousand Words: The Power of Pictures in Books* – transforming the second floor of Centro De Artes Gallery. The City of San Antonio’s Department of Arts & Culture was honored to host this entrancing exhibit, curated by Xelena González and Kim Garza Chbeir and featuring work from 17 of the most beloved Latinx artists in the publishing world today. The illustrations captured a wide range of memories, traditions, and moments, inviting visitors to explore both new and familiar perspectives and experiences through diverse voices. It was beautiful to see our community come together in celebration of local authors and illustrators who are all working to inspire the next generation of storytellers. A digital bookshelf allowed visitors to find the books included in the exhibit at the San Antonio Public Library – giving families the opportunity to continue their shared learning together.

The Department of Arts & Culture is sincerely grateful for the work and collaboration of Xelena González and Kim Garza Chbeir in bringing these illustrations together in a meaningful and accessible way, and to our Cultural Events & Exhibits team and exhibition partners for their hard work in bringing this exhibit to life.

Krystal Jones
Executive Director
City of San Antonio Department of Arts & Culture

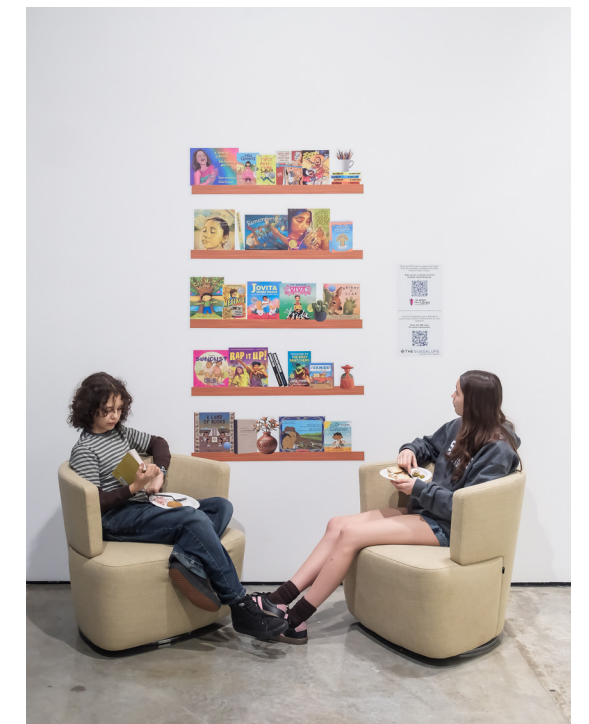
Dear Arts Patron,

We are pleased to showcase this interesting look into the art of children’s books publishing. While these terms sound corporate and perhaps academic, they encompass an array of bright and bold colors that bring stories to life for children, parents, and teachers. I am especially proud of Xelena González, having watched her artistic career flourish over the past few years.

This thoughtful exhibit gives us a fresh perspective on what we consider art. By installing the original artwork next to the book illustration, we can admire the colors, textures, and strokes on the canvas. We see the process on full display and the conversation between author and illustrator to produce a whimsical world for us to enjoy. I hope you will appreciate how these books influence our children and how the artists themselves shift the focus from a mainstream story to one that reflects our Latinx family, life, art, and culture.

Saludos,

Yadhira Lozano
Chair, Centro de Artes Committee
San Antonio Arts Commission
City Council District 3 Representative



A THOUSAND WORDS

by Xelena González

The Power of Pictures in Books

.....

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. That is especially true of picture books, which are often explored before one becomes a reader. Even without the grasp of language, someone can infer a story taking shape across the pages through imagery. When text is also present, a parent or caregiver might be near to breathe the words aloud, sharing space and warmth with the most precious beings among us. It is a treasured ritual that shapes memories and weaves futures.

These gallery walls are filled with some of the first art a human being may ever encounter. A young person might recognize a child who looks like them and imagine themselves immersed in the colorful worlds created by the illustrators in this show. They are among the best and most beloved Latinx artists in the publishing world today. Collectively, they are changing the landscape of young people’s literature and thereby the trajectory of a society that, until recently, has failed to depict the full and splendid diversity of humanity.

As an author of picture books, my stories are limited to a *thousand words*, so I rely heavily on artists to add flesh to the bones of our books. Over the past seven years working in this field, I’ve been lucky to befriend the 17 exhibiting artists who are illustrating books for not only children, but also teens and adults. They are world-builders and game-changers from San Antonio and beyond, representing a beautiful blend of Latinx culture.

At the heart of the show is a sizable collection by my longtime collaborator Adriana M. Garcia, a celebrated muralist who, like me, comes from our city’s Westside. Together we’ve created three picture books and toured them throughout the country. Whenever we encounter neighborhoods like our own – in cities like Houston, Tucson, or Washington D.C. – we are sure to tell those readers that our community looks a lot like theirs. It may not be shiny, new, and economically robust, but it is full of cultural beauty, familial love, and natural wonders. That truth is evident in Garcia’s lush paintings that flow with a vibrant, colorful energy from faces down to roots, swirling around rocks and alongside wind. Such spirited imagery helps these young art enthusiasts notice the majesty within their world, however wide or limited it may be.

Also documented in the show is our unlikely journey into the publishing world, which began in 2016 as a community-based “Story Walk” project shared at Mission Public Library, thanks to grant funding from the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures. We were lucky to find a publisher willing to help us refine our project, *All Around Us*, and turn it into a book – an audacious move considering most publishing houses tend to accept a manuscript from a writer *before* selecting an artist of their own choosing. But El Paso-based Cinco Puntos Press was already making bold industry-leading moves, focusing their lens on the borderlands before it became trendy to do so.



Installation view of photos, early artwork, and drawings from the “Story Walk” project for *All Around Us*, 2016-2018. Courtesy the Artist.

It was through Cinco Puntos that we met Zeke Peña, who would serve as artistic director for our second book *Where Wonder Grows*. What a stroke of extra luck to receive the artistic sensibility of one whose palette is rooted in El Chuco yet conveys a wholly streetwise aesthetic and playfulness that make his comic panels pop and his book covers memorable. After illustrating for several renowned authors, Peña is debuting his first author-illustrator effort during this exhibition, with *Sundust* slated for release in August 2025. His guidance has continued over the years, as he regularly checks in with us when visiting family in town.

This unofficial mentorship is not uncommon within the relatively small-but-expanding Latinx community currently publishing. It reminds me of my younger years at an affluent university where one knew – or at least recognized – all the other brown and black students on campus because our numbers were so few. We often find each other at book festivals, library conferences, or award programs, offering support, encouragement, blurbs, online shoutouts, or whatever the moment requires.

In a similar way, Yuyi Morales has become a friend and mentor over the years. We first met through my work as a librarian (perhaps the biggest champions of picture books) and later at the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Awards. Her characters captured my daughter’s adoration in her early reading years, as she recognized

skin tone that was “brown like me, see?” Morales is the first Latina to receive a Caldecott Honor. Within the pages of *Viva Frida* readers may glimpse her intricate process of creating dolls and puppets as models for her characters. Whether celebrating Mexican-American luminaries and customs or portraying the vulnerable spaces of migration, she remains a pioneer and master in the field.

Our book journey also took us to the Pura Belpré Awards where we encountered Duncan Tonatuih, another legendary book maker. His signature style pays homage to pre-Columbian artistry, visually reminding readers that though we may accept the labels of Latinx, Mexican-American, or various other assignments, the vast majority of us have unshakable ties to the indigenous inhabitants of these lands. Among his many astounding books we could have selected for this show, the choice was clear to feature *A Land of Books: Dreams of Young Mexihcah Word Painters*. Celebrating the customs and creation of Mesoamerican codices, it reminds us that stories and picture books have existed in these lands long before colonization.

Another intriguing component of Mexican history is conveyed in Aida Salazar’s *Jovita Wore Pants: The Story of a Mexican Freedom Fighter*, which earned illustrator Molly Mendoza a Caldecott Honor for their depiction of Jovita Valdovinos, a revolutionary who disguised herself as a man in a fight for religious freedom. Mendoza’s sensibility as a muralist is evident in the sweeping landscapes of campos, rivers, sierras, and starlight. As is their deftness in conveying emotional depth, which appears in their comic repertoire and in scenes such as Jovita’s braid cutting and shedding of other gender norms.

Contrast these scenes with the simplicity and peace depicted in Marcelo Verdad’s *Mexico* – in this case a beach in Oaxaca, where Miguel and Abuelito sell coconuts and dreamcatchers. Whimsical in style and tone, the story also carries a child’s soft-spoken longing to be reconnected with his parents – a plight experienced by many migrating families. Verdad says he aims to create a visual language that is accessible to young ones, employing crayons, cut-outs, bright colors and textures. His ability to connect with children and with his own inner child made us fast friends upon meeting at the Texas Book Festival.

I mention these awards and festivals not only to weave the tale of this exhibition, but also to note that they typically involve free events for readers and art lovers of all ages to meet and learn from some of their favorite creators. Here in San Antonio, we host one of the best such gatherings at the annual San Antonio Book Festival (SABF). It was here where we met several local creators including Carolyn Dee Flores, who works masterfully with watercolors and has more than 23 picture books to her credit; Xavier Garza, another prolific author-illustrator and Cinco Puntos family member whose luchadores playfully bring Latinx culture to life; and John Picacio, a trailblazer in the genres of fantasy and science fiction who has scooped up accolades for his many covers and contributions in those arenas. All these artists introduced themselves to us at our first SABF appearance, each one saying in some form: “Whatever you need, let me know.”

At the 2024 SABF, I was introduced to Pedro Martín, who swept awards season with his epic graphic memoir *Mexikid*, winner of the Pura Belpré Illustrator and Author award, Tomás Rivera Award, Eisner Award (which honors comics), and Newbery Honor (which recognizes the best writing in young people’s literature), among others. For all artists in this show, earning such accolades secures longevity for our works, assuring they will remain in print and on core library lists for years to come (assuming they are not continually boycotted by those who fear diversity). This means a book like *Mexikid*, which follows an 11-member family on a cross-border journey full of humor and heartache, will be studied, borrowed, read aloud, and passed around, for decades, likely outliving its creator. Moreover, it solidifies the experience of Mexican-American culture within the international canon of youth literature.

A common question picture book makers receive is: *How long did it take to make?* For Martín, the process started in his former career working for Hallmark’s line of Shoebox cards. His job involved drafting comical ideas on 3 x 5-inch cards, but he was so expedient at meeting his three-per-week quota that he had ample time to jot down funny memories from childhood. He saved these cards in a Batman lunchbox that, years later, would become a treasure trove of inspiration for his graphic memoir *Mexikid*. Considering the book’s meteoric popularity, this time



Pedro Martín, *Mexikid* Idea Sketch Cards, ca. 1990s and artist’s lunch box, 1966. Courtesy the Artist.

capsule is a true gem within the show, providing a glimpse at the seeds of ideas.

Other artists were generous in sharing their processes and sketches, including *New York Times* bestselling illustrator Raúl The Third, whose ¡Vamos! characters populate a whole series reminiscent of Richard Scarry’s classic books but with a focus on the vibrant, bilingual border between Ciudad Juarez and El Paso. Included here are *El Toro & Friends*, the newest characters from an offshoot early reader graphic novel series that (like many of his books) are written and drawn by Raúl and colored by his wife Elaine Bay.

Like Raúl, Kat Fajardo got an illustrative start in comics and zines. This made her the ideal cover illustrator for Celia Perez’s *The First Rule of Punk*, a middle-grade novel following the skateboarding, punk rocking, zinester Malú. Though one should “never judge a book by its cover,” it is well known within the library and publishing worlds that a compelling cover is the first step to snagging a reader. Here, Austin-based Fajardo shares her process from thumbnail to pencil sketch to final color for both her cover work and panels of her celebrated debut graphic novel *Miss Quinces*. Released simultaneously in English and Spanish (an unusual move in publishing) it features Sue who wants anything *but* a quinceañera for her birthday. Though the story speaks to Fajardo’s Honduran-Columbian heritage, Latinx youth from various regions can relate to navigating ill-fitting traditions in a modern world.

Meanwhile, Maya Gonzalez has long questioned gender conformity and systemic inequality through the lens of art, “using children’s books as radical agents of change and healing, both personally and culturally” (according to their bio). Although the publishing industry has only recently started to acknowledge gender diversity, for the past decade Gonzalez has been creating books such as *The Gender Wheel*, *They She He Me: Free to Be!*, and *Call Me Tree / Llámame árbol* – featured in this show alongside the gorgeous tribute to nature *I Know the River Loves Me*. Among the many aspects to admire within Gonzalez’s work is their determination to provide the books that do not yet exist. Instead of waiting for the publishing industry to catch up with the times, they co-founded Reflection Press to fill the need of an underserved readership.

This show would be incomplete without inclusion of AfroLatinx voices and visions. Though representation is scant within the still-growing circle of Latinx artists in publishing, we were lucky to have met Jeffery Boston Weatherford at the 2024 American Library Association’s Legacy Banquet (where the aforementioned Newbery and Caldecott awards are bestowed). On the walk there, our talk about hip hop led to him freestyling and leading us in a group rap that turned strangers into comrades – a treasured moment within a profession that requires ample solitude. Soon we learned of *Rap it Up!*, which he’d just completed with his mother Carole Boston Weatherford (a luminary in children’s literature) and community-minded muralist Ernel Martinez. Born in Belize but raised in Los Angeles and Detroit, his art is highly influenced by the street art, graffiti, and murals he saw growing up. *Rap it*



Students of Ogden Elementary in collaboration with Kimberly Garza Chbeir, *Rainbow Xelena Portait*, 2019, Acrylic on board, 98 x 46 in. Courtesy Ogden Elementary, San Antonio ISD.

Up! is one of several books that will enjoy its release during the run of this exhibition.

A self-imposed requisite for curating this show was having made a personal connection with the creators. For it is in these casual talks, words of encouragement, professional advice, and vulnerable sharing of a new project that we learn to endure along a path that is still being forged and that we hope others will follow. There are several brilliant artists who could have been in this show, but I have not yet met them. And there are at least a dozen more I longed to include but simply did not have the space to accommodate. Kudos are due to my co-curator Kim Garza Chbeir who helped make selections from an objective, aesthetic standpoint. Garza Chbeir helped create a compelling visual narrative when my main motivation was to express love and gratitude for my curious journey into a colorful world I have adored since first reading picture books at Bazan Library on the city’s Westside.

Although it took a trip to the Tucson Festival of Books (our first book fest!) to join a panel with Maya Gonzalez and another to the Library of Congress National Book Festival to meet Kat Fajardo, there are two artists in this show who were already lighting the way for us here at home. Before entering the field of librarianship, Terry Ybañez was the only picture book artist I’d met, and I was honored when she helped organize our aforementioned story walk at Mission Library where she helped develop the community gardens. I knew Ybañez illustrated books for her friends Sandra Cisneros and Carmen Tafolla – a partnering model that inspired me to pitch my first manuscripts alongside my artist friends. This approach was met with swift rejection and the notice that this was simply *not* how it was done in the publishing industry.

It was Vincent Valdez who suggested long ago that my stories might find a good home with Cinco Puntos Press, and that Adriana might be a good person to ask for illustrations. Ultimately, he was right. I met both Adriana and him on the same evening in Cruz Ortiz’s studio, soon after moving back home following college. I had longed to see the world outside my city, yet I remember recognizing at that moment that our city held a certain kind of magic for artists. One that allows us freedom to create playfully, without weighty expectations, and to receive a rare type of support from fellow artists.

Upon arriving in Washington D.C. to share our second picture book, I walked over to the National Portrait Gallery to see Valdez’s painting of his grandparents, which was the centerpiece of the gallery floor and enjoyed admiration from visitors in multiple languages. It brings so many of us wild joy to witness his success over the years through his multitude of projects that offer a singular and sharp critique of American culture through an unequivocal San Anto lens. I was most excited to discover he would be creating a body of work for a limited edition run of Kurt Vonnegut’s classic *Slaughterhouse-Five* and over the moon when he agreed to include some of the drawings in this show.

Valdez’s pieces are not the only ones intended for an older audience. Though premiering work from his first picture book, most of John Picacio’s illustrations have appeared on the covers of science fiction and fantasy novels, which readers of all ages enjoy. Finally, Jose Sotelo Yamasaki has shared some of his initial sketches and final art from the 54-card deck that accompanies my book *Lotería Remedios*. This new take on the classic Mexican game offers healing remedies and affirmations that align with the icons of each card.

Originally a self-published book, the project was picked up by Hay House in 2022, and Sotelo Yamasaki was contracted to reimagine the time-honored imagery. After a year of discussing and workshoping ideas, sketching and re-working, adding color, and gaining approvals, he developed a splendid collection that weaves my intentions into his signature style that includes narrative components, compelling symbology, and ample mystery. Although the guidebook is written with an older audience in mind, my hope is that these colorful cards continue to introduce young ones to the Spanish language, as it did for many of us Chicanx kids.

Having seen the art process up close through the work of my dear friends, I know that every page of every picture book on every shelf includes not only the imagination of a writer but painstaking hours of thought, indecision, precision, and hard-earned skill from the hands of an artist. What they create can transcend language and unlock young minds. I’m honored to know them and every other creator in this show.



Installation view of César Limón, et al., Tomás Rivera Book Award Poster Collection, 1997 - 2025. Courtesy of Texas State University, Tomás Rivera Collection.

To end, I will circle back to the beginning of the exhibition. This is how I envision most will encounter the show, by viewing the grid of posters that greets visitors arising to the second floor. This collection of winners from the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award chronicles the trajectory of Mexican American art in this particular genre of publishing since 1995. Within this visual timeline one can see the infusion of new voices and artistic styles as well as the implied invitation that welcomes burgeoning creators to envision adding their work to the vibrant lineage.

While this award celebrates the Mexican-American experience specifically, there are others, such as the Pura Belpré Award, that include all of the Latinx community, and still others mentioned here that recognize art in overall genres. Among the 17 artists exhibited – and the many more we were able to share glimpses of through the Tomás Rivera collection – there is a *wealth* of well-deserved accolades for the beautiful ways in which they uplift and celebrate our culture.

I encourage every reader to check out the books shared in this show as well as the illustrators’ other works. Thanks to the virtual library included in the exhibition (and through the QR codes on page 33 of this catalogue) these will be easy to access. Better yet, visit the library in person to get your hands on these books and imagine with the turn of each page a mural, a portrait, a painting on canvas – each spread worthy of a lovely frame, each one worth a thousand words.

About the Curators



Xelena González practices the healing arts through writing and movement. Her award-winning picture books include *All Around Us*, *Where Wonder Grows*, and *Remembering*, all illustrated by her dear friend, celebrated San Anto muralist Adriana M. Garcia. Xelena’s forthcoming titles include *Of the Sun* (Barefoot Books, 2025) and *the smallest thing* (Lee & Low, 2026).

Her writing for adults includes poetry, essays, screenwriting, and a recent body of visionary fiction entitled *Lotería Remedios*, a guidebook of affirmations and positive reflections alongside a 54-card deck illustrated by another Westside comrade, printmaker Jose Sotelo Yamasaki.

Although Xelena grew up amid artists and played make-believe within the gallery at Centro Cultural Aztlan (which her father Carlos co-founded and led), this is the only show she has ever desired to curate. Xelena reviewed art in her former profession as a freelance journalist as well as many picture books within her roles as a public and school librarian. Visit her online at XELENA.SPACE



Kim Garza Chbeir is an artist, curator, and art educator based in San Antonio, Texas. Originally from the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo border, her work—primarily painting—is deeply influenced by her borderland upbringing, personal experiences, and research. Garza Chbeir is dedicated to promoting visual arts education as an art educator and resident artist in various San Antonio campuses. She believes that the heart of art education lies in the creation of collaborative projects, where students of all ages unite to transform spaces and express collective narratives through various art media. Her mission is to create, curate, and share the transformative power of art through education and collaborative projects, inspiring audiences to engage in visual communication.

ADRIANA M. GARCIA



Adriana M. Garcia creates visual and public art, paints murals, and illustrates books. This home-grown San Anto, Tejas based Chicana artist dedicates her brush to portraying the stories of this region to affirm its unique tapestry of cultural heritage. She likes being weird with friends and spending time with her partner and two dogs.

About her favorite color, Adriana says: “phthalo blue feels like space, a place where all the other colors can come and play. It’s the first color I lay down when beginning a new work. When I’m done, sometimes you can’t even see the phthalo blue anymore; other times, it peeks out here and there.”



Installation view of paintings with original artwork from *Where Wonder Grows* by Xelena González, 2021 (Cinco Puntos Press/Lee & Low Books); *Remembering* by Xelena González, 2023 (Simon & Schuster); *A Girl Becoming* by Joy Harjo, 2025 (Norton Young Readers).



Installation view of artwork from *Remembering* by Xelena González (Simon & Schuster), 2023, Acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 in. each. Courtesy the Artist.



They are alive with wisdom, so we call them grandfathers and grandmothers./ In school we learn that rocks are things. But grandma has taught us they are beings., 2021, Acrylic on wood, 25 x 25 in. each., *From Where Wonder Grows* by Xelena González (Cinco Puntos Press / Lee & Low Books). Courtesy the Artist.



This is how we thank you for your fierce protection and your warmth on cold nights., 2023, Acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 in., *From Remembering* by Xelena González (Simon & Schuster). Courtesy the Artist.

JOSE SOTELO YAMASAKI



Jose Sotelo Yamasaki is a painter, screen printer, and illustrator based in San Antonio. His work explores themes of nature, sustainability, and existentialism. Paying homage to his mixed heritage, Jose’s art is influenced by Mesoamerican design, Mexican folk art, Japanese Zen art, and the surrounding environment. He owns and operates Tu y Yo, an exclusive online gallery showcasing the vibrant artwork that makes San Antonio a cultural mecca. *Lotería Remedios* (written by Xelena González) is his first publication.

Jose says his favorite picture book growing up was *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.



Clockwise from Top Left: Sketches of *El Gallo*, *El Alacran*, *El Sol*, *El Nopal*, 2022-2023, Graphite on paper, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the Artist.



Clockwise from Top Left: *La Calavera/The Skull*, *El Corazón/The Heart*, *La Sandía/The Watermelon*, *La Mano/The Hand*, 2023, Digital prints, From *Lotería Remedios Oracle* by Xelena González (Hay House). Courtesy the Artist.



Installation views of artwork from *Lotería Remedios Oracle* by Xelena González (Hay House). Courtesy the Artist.

KAT FAJARDO



Kat Fajardo is a Honduran Colombian award-winning cartoonist who loves creating playful and colorful illustrations, zines, and graphic novels about self-acceptance and Latine culture. She's the creator of *Miss Quinces*, which was a national indie bestseller, and its Spanish edition, *Srta. Quinces*, which received a Pura Belpre Award Honor.

About her early drawing days, Kat says, "As a kid, I was obsessed with anime, and spent countless hours drawing fanart of my favorite characters. My love for Pokémon was so strong that classmates often requested doodles of their favorites, and I was always thrilled to share my passion for art through these fun sketches."

CAROLYN DEE FLORES

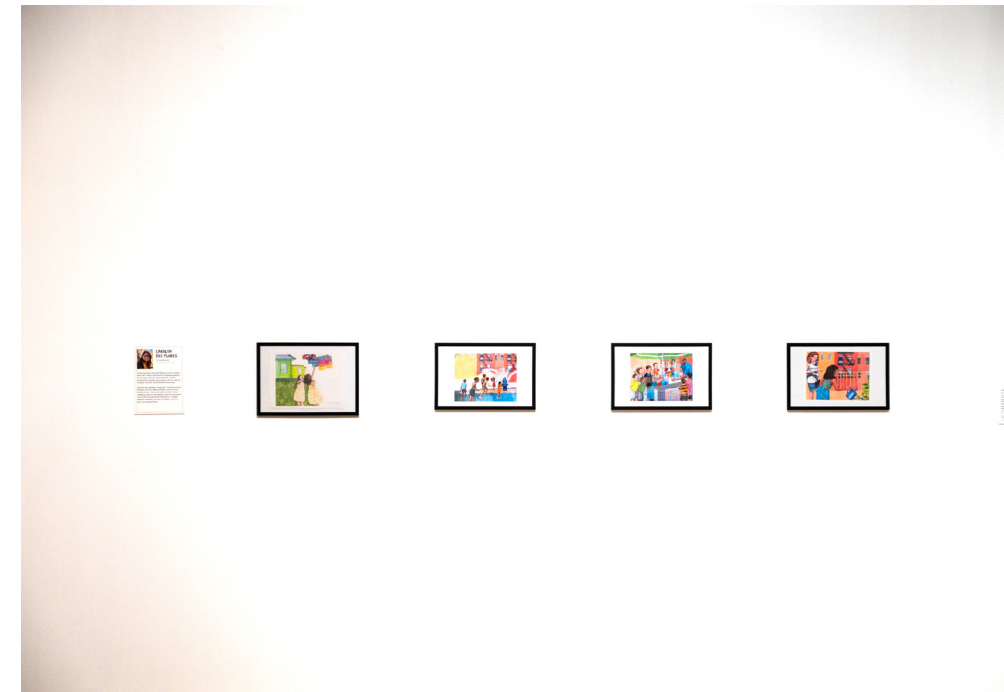


Carolyn Dee Flores is the author/illustrator of over 23 children's books. She's writing a novel about her 12th-great-grandmothers: Ana of Aragon and Leonor Cortes Moctezuma. Carolyn's favorite place is her studio where she plays with clay, draws lots of pictures, and writes - like she did when she was seven.

About her early inspirations, Carolyn says: "The black and white illustration of donuts in Robert McCloskey's *Homer Price and the Donut Factory* - the one with stacks and stacks of donuts overflowing! I still carry that illustration around with me wherever I go. And all of the super-colorful illustrations in our reading textbooks in elementary school by Jerry Pinkney. I met Jerry, later, and we became friends."



Installation view of thumbnail, penciled page, and image from *Miss Quinces: A Graphic Novel*, 2020 (Scholastic, Graphix) and cover concepts and book jacket from *The First Rule of Punk* by Celia C. Pérez, 2016 (Viking Books for Young Readers). Courtesy the Artist.



Left: Installation view of artwork from *A Surprise for Teresita* by Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, 2016 (Arte Público Press, Piñata Books). Top Right: *Two Birthdays, One Piñata*, 2024, Watercolor on Arches 140, 15 x 13 in. Bottom Right: *Teresita Watering with her Mother on the Balcony*, 2016, Oil on cardboard, 12 x 9 in. Courtesy the Artist.

XAVIER GARZA



Xavier Garza is an artist and storyteller who has authored and illustrated over 20 books, including *Creepy Creatures and other Cucuys* and *Lucha Libre: The Man in the Silver Mask*. Born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, he is a professor of art at Northwest Vista College in San Antonio.

About his early drawing days, Xavier says, "I drew on anything I could get my hands on. Brown paper bags from the local grocery store were my first sketchbooks. I wanted to draw everything I saw. I loved comic books, so the first things I learned to draw were superheroes like Batman and Spiderman."



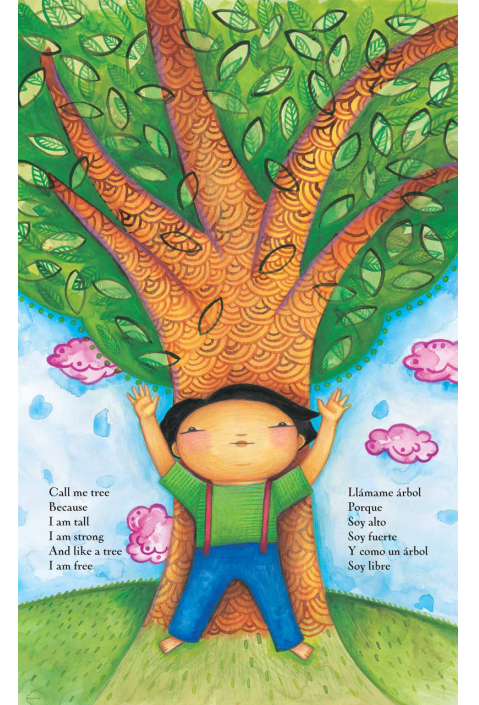
Left: Installation view of artwork from *The Great and Mighty Nikko*, 2014 (Lee & Low Books); Top Right: *The Great and Mighty Nikko!*, 2014, Acrylic on paper, 11 x 22 in., Bottom Right: *King Jaguar is Here!*, 2014, Acrylic on paper, 11 x 11 in. Courtesy the Artist.

MAYA GONZALEZ



Maya Gonzalez is an award-winning children's book artist, author, activist and progressive educator. Maya's work addresses systemic inequity in relation to race/ethnicity, sexism, and cissexism using children's books as radical agents of change and healing, both personally and culturally. Maya co-founded Reflection Press, a POC, queer and trans owned independent publishing house that uses holistic, nature-based, and anti-oppression frameworks in their books and materials for kids and grown-ups.

About their early drawings, Maya says: "As a child I would always go to the back of my books and draw my big, round Chicanx face in. Even though (or because) I didn't see myself reflected in the story or the art... I knew on some level that I belonged there. I have been using art and story to be more fully present ever since!"



Installation view and detail of artwork from *I Know the River Loves Me*, 2009 and *Call Me Tree*, 2014, Digital Prints (Children's Book Press/Lee & Low Books). Courtesy the Artist.

PEDRO MARTÍN



The son of an immigrant sharecropper and one of nine kids, Pedro Martín spent his childhood in the strawberry fields of the Monterey Bay Area. He recollects those years in his online series *Mexikid Stories*. In 2023 he debuted *Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir* which garnered him the Newbery Honor Award, An Eisner Award, as well as the Pura Belpré Author and Illustrator awards.

Pedro's favorite thing to draw as a kid was Superman! He loved comic books and always felt like he could probably draw one if he just knew how. So, he borrowed his brother's favorite comic books and took to tracing and drawing over the characters right on the page! Even though he ruined many comic books and got punched in the arm repeatedly, Pedro eventually learned to draw a decent Superman.

ERNEL MARTINEZ

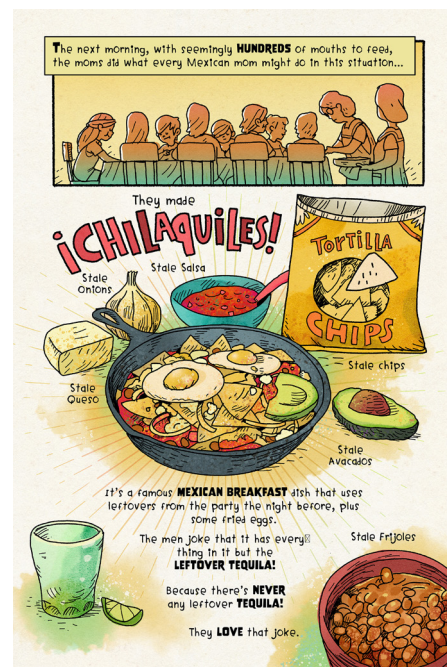


Ernel Martinez was born in Belize and raised in South Central Los Angeles and Detroit. He earned a BFA from Kutztown University and in 2004 received his MFA at the University of Pennsylvania. As a public artist, Martinez believes every neighborhood and community has a story to tell, and he provides them with artistic tools and platforms to share those stories.

Of his characters, Ernel says: "The primary inspiration for this book undoubtedly came from my 13-year-old daughter. As a budding artist herself, our shared passion for art-making brought us closer together. In fact, she plays a central role in the story as one of the main characters."



Installation view and detail of artwork from *Mexikid*, 2023, Digital prints (Dial Books for Young Readers). Courtesy the Artist.



Installation view and details of artwork from *Rap it Up!* by Carole Boston Weatherford & Jeffery Boston Weatherford (Macmillan Publishers), 2025, Digital prints, 20 x 30 in., each. Courtesy the Artist.



MOLLY MENDOZA



Molly Mendoza is an artist living in Portland, Oregon. Through their work they explore the complex emotions of interpersonal relationships and self-love with a focus on layered visual storytelling, mark-making, and color. Throughout their career they've created murals, comics, picture books, editorial works, and paintings; each experience holding the hand of the other in the pursuit of personal practice. Molly is the recipient of a Caldecott Honor for their illustrations in *Jovita Wore Pants* by Aida Salazar. They've also been honored by Eisner and Ignatz nominations for their work in comics.

About their favorite color, Molly says: "The color red can mean anger, love, hunger, or warmth. Red can be scary and sweet. I love the way the sun goes from yellow, to orange, to red as it sets. Most of all, I love the way trees turn red in the fall."



Installation view and details of artwork from *Jovita Wore Pants: The Story of a Mexican Freedom Fighter* by Aida Salazar (Scholastic Books), 2025, Digital prints. Courtesy the Artist.



YUYI MORALES



Yuyi Morales is a six-time Pura Belpré Award winner and Caldecott Honor recipient from Xalapa, Veracruz. Her book *Dreamers* received the Pura Belpré Award and was a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Book and a *New York Times* best seller. Her most recent books are *Bright Star* and *Lucero*.

Yuyi says her first introduction to art was her mother's resourcefulness. She sewed Yuyi and her sisters' clothes, bedsheets, curtains, and lampshades. When the family couldn't afford the gifts the girls wanted for their birthdays, Yuyi's mother would make everything from the cakes to the invitations to their dresses to their shoes.



Installation view and details of artwork from (left to right) *Viva Frida*, 2013 (Neal Porter Books, Roaring Brook Press) and *Bright Star*, 2021 (Neal Porter Books, Holiday House), Digital prints. Top Right: *The Most Beautiful World*, from *Bright Star*. Bottom Right: *¡Vivo!/I live!*, from *Viva Frida*. Courtesy the Artist.



ZEKE PEÑA



Zeke Peña is a professional doodler and an aspiring time traveler. He was born in the Chihuahuan desert and grew up in a place called Sun City. His author-illustrator debut, *Sundust* (Summer 2025) takes readers on a run through a beautiful desert landscape with two siblings chasing a fallen piece of sundust. Zeke also illustrated *Miles Morales Suspended: A Spider-Man Novel*, *My Papi Has a Motorcycle*, and *Photographic: The Life of Graciela Iturbide*.

About his early drawings, Zeke says: “As a young person, I really enjoyed learning how to draw cartoon and comic characters that I liked. When I got to middle school I started drawing and designing my own comic characters that were like fantasy characters with a sci-fi super power twist. Not a whole lot has changed since then, lol.”



Installation view and details of artwork from *Sundust* (Kokila/Penguin Young Readers), 2025, Digital prints, 12 x 24 in. each. Courtesy the Artist.



JOHN PICACIO



John Picacio is a three-time Hugo Award Winner and one of the most acclaimed artists in science fiction and fantasy over the last two decades. He’s created best-selling cover artwork for well over 150 major science fiction/fantasy books including works by George R.R. Martin, Michael Moorcock, Leigh Bardugo, Rebecca Roanhorse, Harlan Ellison, and more.

Of his characters, John says: “I relate most to Cala, the girl in my debut picture book *The Invisible Parade*. I love her because she’s inspired by my daughter and my love for our cultura.”



Installation view of artwork from (left to right) *Mirrored Heavens* by Rebecca Roanhorse, 2022 (Simon & Schuster / Saga Press); *The Invisible Parade* by Leigh Bardugo and John Picacio, 2022 (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers); *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* by Jack Finney, 60th Anniversary Edition, 2015 (Simon & Schuster/Touchstone); *Fevered Star* by Rebecca Roanhorse, 2021 (Simon & Schuster/Saga Press). Digital Prints. Courtesy the Artist.



Top: Double-page Spread, 2025, from *The Invisible Parade*. Bottom: Cover Illustration, 2022, from *Mirrored Heavens*. Courtesy the Artist.

RAÚL THE THIRD



Raúl The Third is a *New York Times* bestselling and three-time Pura Belpre award-winning illustrator, author, and artist living in Boston. *¡Vamos! Let's Cross the Bridge* was awarded one of the year's Best Illustrated Children's Books of 2021 from the *New York Times* and the New York Public Library. His work would not be complete without the dazzling color expertly applied by his wife and frequent collaborator Elaine Bay. They live in the Boston area with their son Raul the Fourth.

About his early drawings, Raúl says: "I used to be a human copy machine, a natural born forger! I learned how to copy signatures, characters from caricaturas, comic strips, comic books, book illustrations. All of these were my favorite things to draw! Today my drawing style is a combination of all of the wonderful people I copied as a kid and my signature is all my own!"

DUNCAN TONATIUH



Duncan Tonatiuh is an award-winning author-illustrator. He grew up in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico and graduated from Parsons School of Design in New York. His artwork is inspired by Mesoamerican art. He aims to create images and stories that honor the past, but that are relevant to children nowadays.

About his early drawings, Duncan says: "When I was a kid, my cousins and I collected comic books, like *Spider-Man* and *The X-Men*. We would get together and imagine our own superheroes and villains. We started drawing and writing our own comics. I have been drawing and writing ever since."



Installation view and details of artwork from *Training Day: El Toro and Friends*, 2021, Colors by Elaine Bay, Digital prints, 16 x 24 in. each., From *World of ¡Vamos!* (Versify, an imprint of HarperCollins). Courtesy the Artist.



Installation view and details of artwork from *A Land of Books: Dreams of Young Mexihcah Word Painters*, 2022, Digital prints, 16 x 24 in. and 24 x 36 in., each. (Abrams Books for Young Readers). Courtesy the Artist.



VINCENT VALDEZ

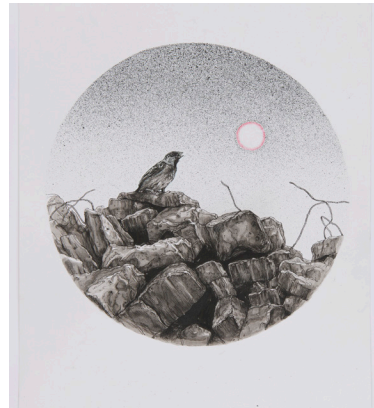


Vincent Valdez is known internationally for his powerful and thought-provoking paintings exploring identity, social justice, and American history. His work has been included in multiple exhibitions and collections including: The Ford Foundation, The Smithsonian Museum of American Art, and The National Portrait Gallery. Originally from San Antonio, Valdez currently lives and works between Houston and Los Angeles.

About his early drawing days, Vincent says: "I learned to draw from comic books and science books about dinosaurs. They taught me so much about drawing human figures and animals as well as landscapes and environments. As I began reading, comic books provided me with ideas about how to begin to tell my own stories."



Installation view and details of artwork from the *Slaughterhouse-Five* Drawing Series, 2023, Digital prints, 24 x 36 in. and 16 x 24 in. each. From *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (Arion Press). Courtesy the Artist.



MARCELO VERDAD



Marcelo Verdad is the author-illustrator of *The Worst Teddy Ever* and *The Dream Catcher* as well as their Spanish editions. Both books have garnered multiple accolades including a 2022 Indigo Best Book of the Year. Originally from Mexico, he is based in Los Angeles where he teaches art and treasures his furry companion, Prana.

About his character, Marcelo says, "I feel a deep connection with Miguelito from *The Dream Catcher*. He embodies the naïve, innocent part of me from childhood, before facing life's hardships. I kept him pure to honor that time, and now, he represents what I aspire to be as I grow older."



Installation view and details of artwork from *The Dream Catcher*, 2024, Digital prints, 17 x 9.5 in. each. (Little Brown). Courtesy the Artist.



TERRY YBAÑEZ



Terry A. Ybañez is a painter, educator, and community servant whose picture book illustrations include *Hairs/Pelitos* by Sandra Cisneros (Random House) and *That's Not Fair!: Emma Tenayuca's Struggle for Justice* by Carmen Tafolla (Wings Press). She is currently President of the Friends of Mission Library.

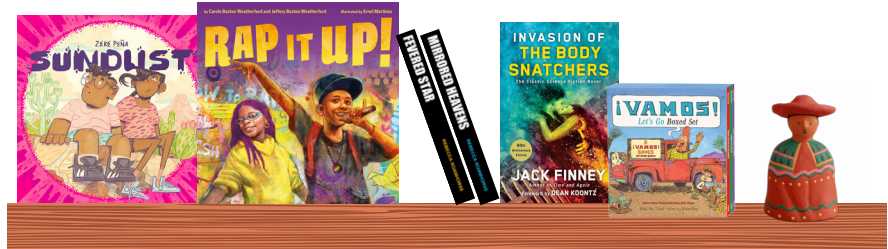
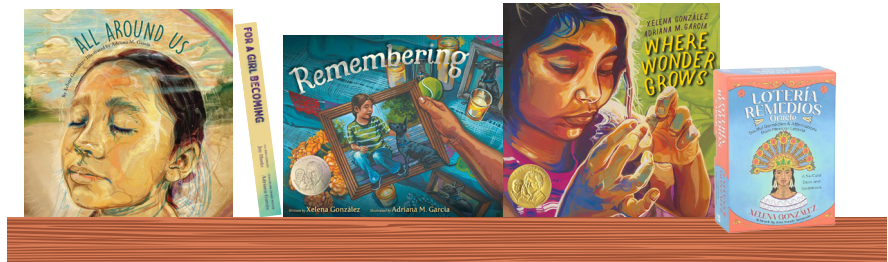
About her book characters, Terry says: "Emma Tenayuca is the character in my illustrations that best represents me and that I feel connected to. She is one of my heroes and reflects characteristics that I believe in: commitment to standing up for others, belief that education is important, and unapologetic about who she was or what she believed in."



Left: Installation view of artwork from *That's Not Fair! Emma Tenayuca's Struggle for Justice* by Carmen Tafolla, 2008 (Wings Press). Right: Pages 4-5 (top) and Pages 26-27 (bottom), 2008, Acrylic on paper, 9 x 23 ½ in., each. Courtesy the Artist.



Digital Library



Scan the QR Code to explore the books from the exhibition available at the San Antonio Public Library.

Sign up for a Library Card at mysapl.org/cardsignup



SAN ANTONIO PUBLIC LIBRARY
information. imagination. ideas.

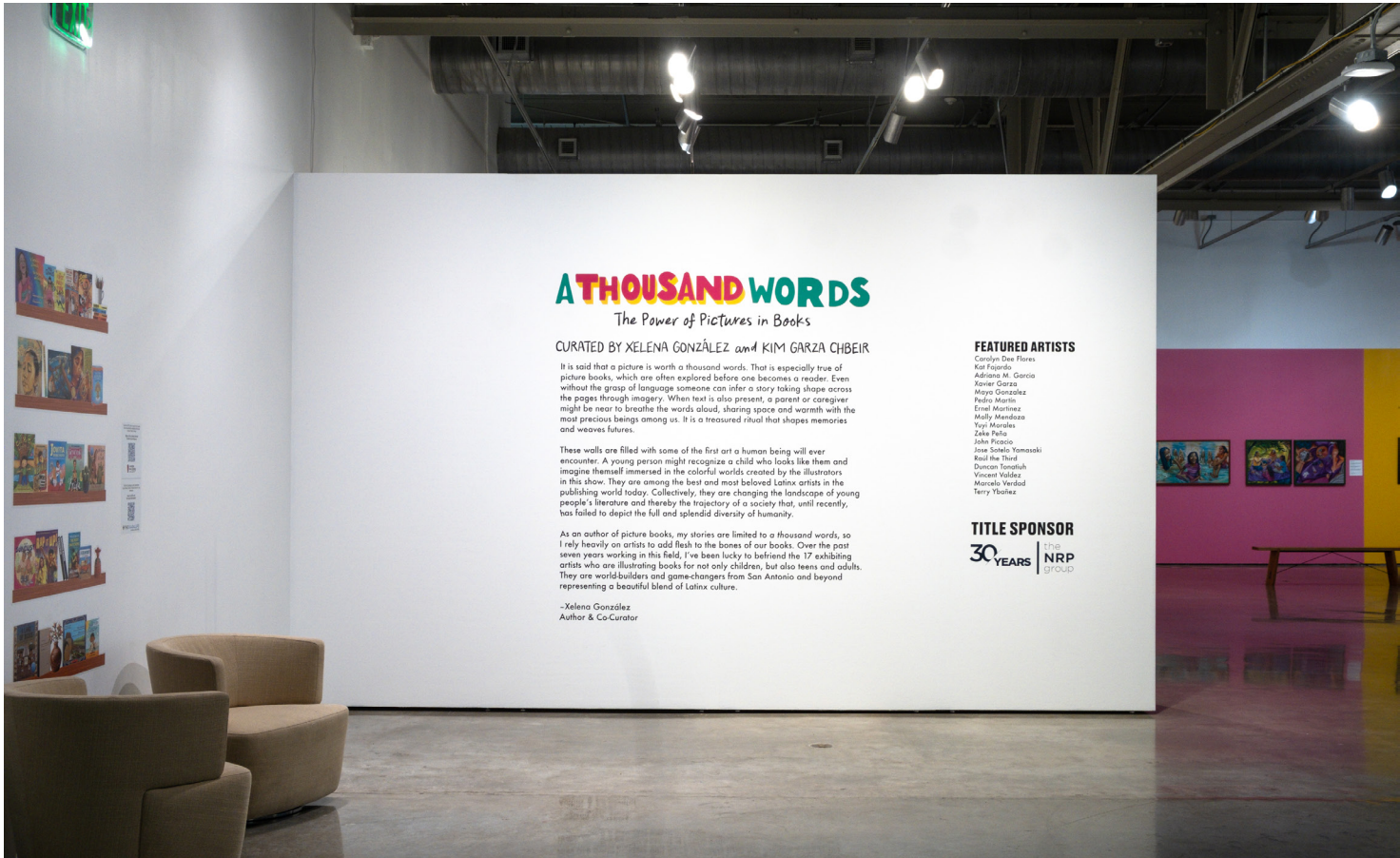
Visit the Guadalupe Latino Bookstore to purchase copies of these books for your home collection.

Scan the QR code for more information



THE GUADALUPE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER

The Exhibition



Installation views of *A Thousand Words: The Power of Pictures in Books* exhibition at Centro de Artes Gallery, San Antonio, Texas.



Installation views of *A Thousand Words: The Power of Pictures in Books* exhibition at Centro de Artes Gallery



About Centro de Artes

Centro de Artes gallery is dedicated to showcasing San Antonio and South Texas Latino/a artists. Found in the heart of the Zona Cultural, an officially designated and state-recognized cultural district, Centro de Artes is dedicated to telling the story of the Latino experience with a focus on South Texas through local and regional art, history, and culture. As a space that is free and open to the public, and located in Historic Market Square - one of the most visited cultural venues in Texas – Centro de Artes is at the center of a cultural and historical crossroads, accessible to residents and visitors, alike.

Since October 2016, the Department of Arts & Culture has managed Centro de Artes and showcased the works of more than 500 San Antonio artists. The City of San Antonio continues to support local artists and provide opportunities for them to show their works. Through a robust community-engaged process to develop the Centro de Artes Strategic Plan, overseen by the Centro de Artes Committee, the mission of celebrating and honoring Latino arts and culture, with a priority on showcasing San Antonio and regional artists, continues.

Centro de Artes Committee

Yadhira Lozano, Chair (San Antonio Arts Commission Member, District 3)

Ellen Riojas Clark, Ph.D. (San Antonio Arts Commission Member, District 7)

Mari Sandoval (San Antonio Arts Commission Member, District 5)

Sarah Gould, Ph.D.

Nicole Amri

Gabriella Scott



Jose Sotelo Yamasaki, *El Musico/The Musician*, 2023, From *Lotería Remedios Oracle* by Xelena González (Hay House). Courtesy the Artist.

