

Trans Women of Peru Celebrated in "Canon" Exhibit at McClain Gallery

BY SUSIE TOMMANEY

TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 2016 AT 8 A.M.



Carol, by Juan José Barboza-Gubo and Andrew Mroczek from their "Virgenes de la Puerta" series, part of the "Canon" exhibit at McClain Gallery

Courtesy of McClain Gallery and the artists

As a child, Peru-born Juan José Barboza-Gubo witnessed the brutal beating of a trans woman and it made him wonder, "Why no value?" Fast-forward many years and academic degrees later to the man, now an artist with years of teaching

degrees later to the man, now an artist with years of teaching experience, who has found a way to return dignity to these fringe dwellers of Lima's society in the "**Canon**" exhibit at McClain Gallery.

He and collaborator Andrew Mroczek are displaying 11 portrait tableaus and two costumes inspired by Spanish Colonial paintings and 19th-century vernacular photographs from their "Virgenes de la Puerta" series. The portraits are beautiful, textured compositions that invoke symbols of the Catholic Church and culture that shunned these trans women: crown of thorns, beaded cape, halo and offering plate. The artists worked with local craftsmen to create the traditional costumes, including a gown made of hundreds of embroidered flowers, a 25-foot hand-crocheted veil, and crowns of silver and gold.

While some of the models were insecure, lonely and ostracized, others felt confident, empowered and radiantly beautiful. Most of the images were taken using an eight-by-ten view camera, with the women partially clothed or nude, and at different stages of transition. The vignettes that introduce architecture are most stunning: as in *Carol*, where the model in hoop skirt basks in the sunlight, surrounded by heavily carved doors with tinted windows; and *Lucha*, holding a flag in what could be the ruins of an old church with broken stained glass at her feet; and *Janny & Nuria*, seated in an ornately carved gilded alcove, crossed legs entwined, with their breasts echoing the design on the Ionic columns.





Andreina & Sara Nicolle (detail), by Juan José Barboza-Gubo and Andrew Mroczek from their "Virgenes de la Puerta" series, part of the "Canon" exhibit at McClain Gallery

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In the Quechua tradition, a woman's braids indicate her status: Worn in front means she is single, worn behind shows she is engaged, while married women wear their hair tied up. In Peru, many of the classic Colonial homes are being destroyed, and the artists took the photograph of *Andreina & Sara Nicolle* in a home that was demolished a week later. In the image, their braids are worn in front, but the artists have played with the concept that they will never be married by showing hair so long it pools on the floor.

UPCOMING EVENTS

[Neches River Festival Coronation](#)

Sat., Apr. 9, 7:00pm

[TICKETS](#)

[Live Nation Presents The Divas of Drag](#)

Sun., Apr. 17, 7:00pm

[TICKETS](#)

[IIDA - Product Runway 2016: Avant Art](#)

Fri., Apr. 22, 7:00pm

[TICKETS](#)

[NETworks presents Disney's Beauty a...](#)

Wed., Apr. 27, 7:30pm

[TICKETS](#)

The exhibit includes three haunting landscapes from their "Fatherland" series that document the locations of hate crimes or murder. While the images could be viewed as benign, it is their accompanying text that shows the true horror. One victim had his genitals, fingers and toes cut from his body; another was abused by his own family and eventually hanged himself; while in the third, the victim was gang-raped, sodomized with objects and left to die on some farmland.

The news coming out of Peru for the LGBTQ community is not all grim, however. The artists report that the younger generation of gay male millennials are out and proud, and these young men are celebrated in their "Los Chicos" series, currently on view in Providence, Rhode Island.

"Canon" continues through May 14. McClain Gallery, 2242 Richmond. Open Tuesdays to Fridays, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Saturdays 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., 713-520-9988, mcclaingallery.com. Free.
