



San Antonio  
Museum  
of Art

## San Antonio Museum of Art Acquires Important Works By Pioneering American Photographer Laura Aguilar

**San Antonio, TX—March 31, 2022**—The San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA) announced today that it has acquired seven photographs by pioneering American photographer Laura Aguilar. The works are drawn from three of Aguilar’s major series, including *Clothed/Unclothed*, *Stillness*, and *Motion*. Aguilar’s practice engaged with and challenged societal constructs relating to beauty, gender, sexuality, race, and class, shaping some of today’s most critical art dialogues. She often leveraged her own experiences as queer, large-bodied, and Chicana to examine questions of identity and the ways it affects how we navigate and live in the world. Although she was immersed in the East Los Angeles Chicano art scene throughout the 1980s and 1990s and created an expansive body of work, Aguilar’s significant contributions to the trajectory of art and its role in wider conversations about social issues only came into national awareness in recent years and requires further scholarly study and critical attention.

The acquisition of photographs by Aguilar reflects SAMA’s ongoing focus on diversifying its contemporary holdings, and especially its growing collection of photography. The acquisition also supports the vision of the Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016, which aims to place the artist’s work in public collections. Aguilar’s photographs are printed in limited-edition series—with many works no longer available—making SAMA’s acquisition particularly important to ongoing public access.

“Laura’s work is stunning in both its conceptual and formal rigor. She was well ahead of her time in examining identity and equality within the art world and in our communities, and her vision is essential to the narrative of contemporary art,” said Lana Meador, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at SAMA. “Her photographs add an important dimension to SAMA’s growing photography collection and connect with works by other contemporary artists in our collection who address art historical and social norms. This is a significant and exciting acquisition for SAMA, and we look forward to sharing these works with our audiences.”

This acquisition follows the February 2022 announcement that SAMA received a gift of twenty-nine photographs by eight prominent American photographers, including Mark Citret, Mike Disfarmer, Leonard Freed, Henry Horenstein, Danny Lyon, Bill Owens, Lou Stoumen, and William Witt, as well as a separate gift of twelve additional photographs by Leonard Freed. Other recent photography acquisitions include works by Christina Fernandez, LaToya Ruby Frazier, and Texas-based artist Earlie Hudnall Jr.

### **More About the Acquired Works**

#### ***Clothed/Unclothed***

In 1990, Aguilar began work on her largest series, *Clothed/Unclothed*, which is comprised of thirty-five portraits of individuals, couples, or threesomes—all close friends of the artist. The individuals are portrayed side-by-side, clothed and nude, beginning with the artist’s powerful self-portrait *Clothed/Unclothed #1*. In contrast to art historical precedents and mainstream visual culture, Aguilar’s

subjects are diverse in their body types, sexual orientation, and relationship to one another. She gave particular focus to people in the lesbian and gay communities as well as individuals of color. This is reflected in the Latina lesbian couple featured in *Clothed/Unclothed #17*, which SAMA has acquired. This body of work paved the way for Aguilar's celebrated self-portraits in nature series and now her international renown.

### ***Stillness***

SAMA has acquired *Stillness #18, #25, and #27*. Inspired in part by her mentor Judy Dater's feminist nude self-portraits in nature, Aguilar began exploring the genre in her own work. The *Stillness* series features Aguilar's nude body amidst the landscape of the US Southwest. Many of the images in this acclaimed series were captured in the San Antonio area during Aguilar's participation in the Artpace International Artist-in-Residence Program during the summer of 1999. *Stillness #25* and *#27* were shot in Southern California's Mojave Desert just prior to Aguilar's residency at Artpace. *Stillness #18* features the Texas landscape. The series portrays a reverence for self and nature through continuity and symbiosis between the body/self and its surroundings. At the same time, it responds to the art historical convention of the female nude and the gaze of the traditional white, male, heterosexual viewer by challenging normative conceptions of beauty and rendering her large, brown body both visible and obscured in the natural environment.

### ***Motion***

The *Motion* series was completed in Texas after Aguilar's Artpace residency and continues her explorations of the nude female body in nature. *Motion #46, #56, and #59*—all of which SAMA has acquired—each include Aguilar and two other women representing a range of body types and skin tones, signifying the intersections of identity. Their bodily interactions with each other mirror the movement and rhythm of the natural environment. As in the *Stillness* series the women's faces are obscured, complicating notions of portraiture and emphasizing the formal relationships between their bodies and the landscape.

### **More About Laura Aguilar**

Although largely self-taught, Aguilar took photography classes at East Los Angeles College. She has been recognized with awards including Anonymous Was a Woman (2020); Artpace International Artist-in-Residence Program (1999); California Community Foundation's J. Paul Getty Grant for the Visual Arts (1998); and the James D. Phelan Award in photography (1995). Her work has been shown in dozens of exhibitions, including at the 1993 Venice Biennale and in the 2017 retrospective *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell*, which was part of the Pacific Standard Time LA/LA exhibition series and traveled to four venues nationwide. Her work is included in major public collections, including Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY; Ruby City, San Antonio, TX; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; Tate, London, UK; Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, among others. She died prematurely at the age of 58 in April 2018.

### **About the San Antonio Museum of Art**

The San Antonio Museum of Art serves as a forum to explore and connect with art that spans the world's geographies, artistic periods, genres, and cultures. Its collection contains nearly 30,000 works representing 5,000 years of history, and is particularly strong in Greek and Roman antiquities, Asian art,

and art of the Americas. The Nelson A. Rockefeller Latin American Art wing spans the ages from the ancient Americas to the present and includes an outstanding collection of pre-Columbian and folk art. In recent years, the Museum has placed particular emphasis on diversifying its contemporary collections to reflect the true diversity of voices shaping the trajectory of art. This has included an emphasis on works by women artists, artists of color, and artists from San Antonio and across the state of Texas.

San Antonio is the nation's seventh-largest city and is consistently listed as one of its fastest-growing. The Museum is housed in the historic Lone Star Brewery on the Museum Reach of San Antonio's River Walk, and is committed to promoting the rich cultural heritage and life of the city. It hosts hundreds of events and public programs each year, including concerts, performances, tours, lectures, symposia, and interactive experiences. As an active civic leader, the Museum is dedicated to enriching the cultural life of the city and the region, and to supporting its creative community. It welcomes approximately 110,000 visitors per year.

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