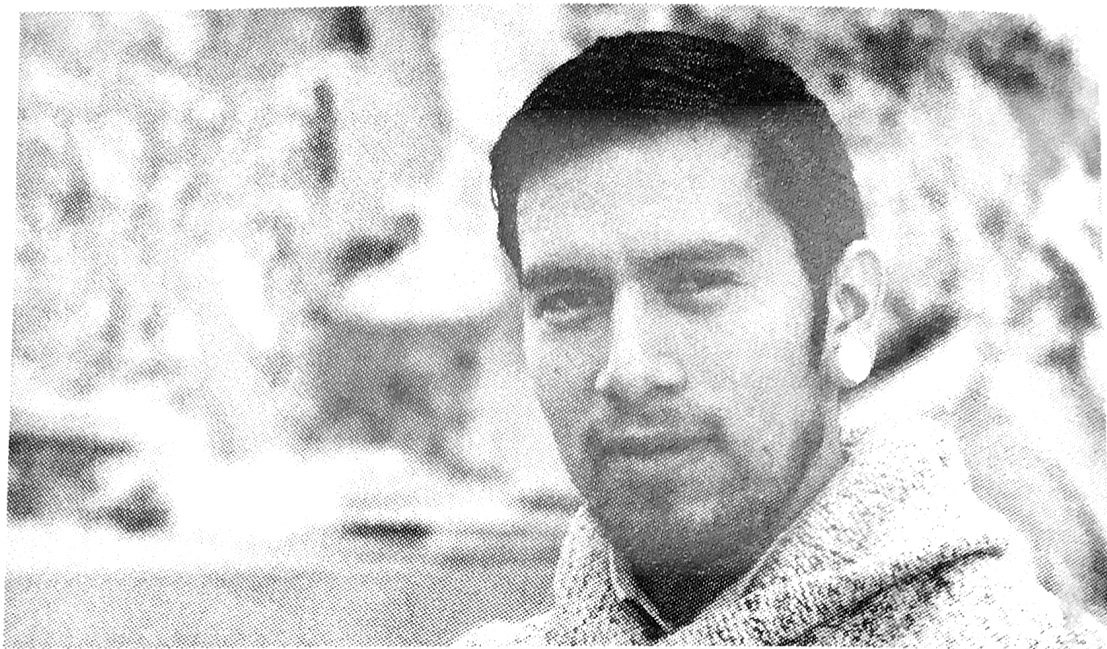


# BEYOND THE STUDIO



## **Fidencio Fifield-Perez**

*Lisa Gulesserian profiles Fidencio Fifield-Perez (né Martinez-Perez), one of three artists-in-residence at Galveston Artist Residency this year. His work will be exhibited alongside that of his fellow residents beginning June 3rd in the GAR Gallery (2521 Mechanic Street on the west side of Downtown Galveston).*

Multicolored map scraps and empty glue bottles litter the floor of Fidencio Fifield-Perez's studio at the Galveston Artist Residency. Elsewhere, used envelopes collect in piles and potted cacti grow towards the sun. These maps, scraps, envelopes, and cacti are the materials Fidencio has used to create large textured wall hangings and intimate painted plant portraits during the past seven months of his residency at GAR. About his time in Galveston, Fidencio says that "the work, I'd like to think, is making giant leaps. It's all this time and feedback."

Fidencio's latest work-in-progress spans the entire width of his studio. In its current state, it's a collage of maps with the faint outlines of a chain-link fence drawn in pencil. Over the next two months, Fidencio will paint motifs on the back of the piece, only to cut away both map and motif to reveal a fragile fence. When he's finished cutting, the completed piece will hang in

the Dubuque Museum of Art in Iowa. GAR made this commissioned work possible. "Just today, I was thinking, this wouldn't have fit in my apartment in Chicago... maybe in the living room, but everything would have to have been shoved out."

If in Galveston Fidencio's art has made the leap into uncharted territories of size and scope, his philosophy of artistic practice has been honed during his time on the island, too. "I tell a lot of people that Eric [Schnell, of GAR] is a living example that artists don't have to be starving, working in their studio nonstop. And that's something that I sort of believe: What abilities do you have, what vision do you have, to give to others? Having a studio practice that is beyond yourself. I love that, and I'll remember that for the rest of my life." And yet, for Fidencio, this important lesson learned from GAR of the role of artists in society is a challenging one to heed given his personal history.

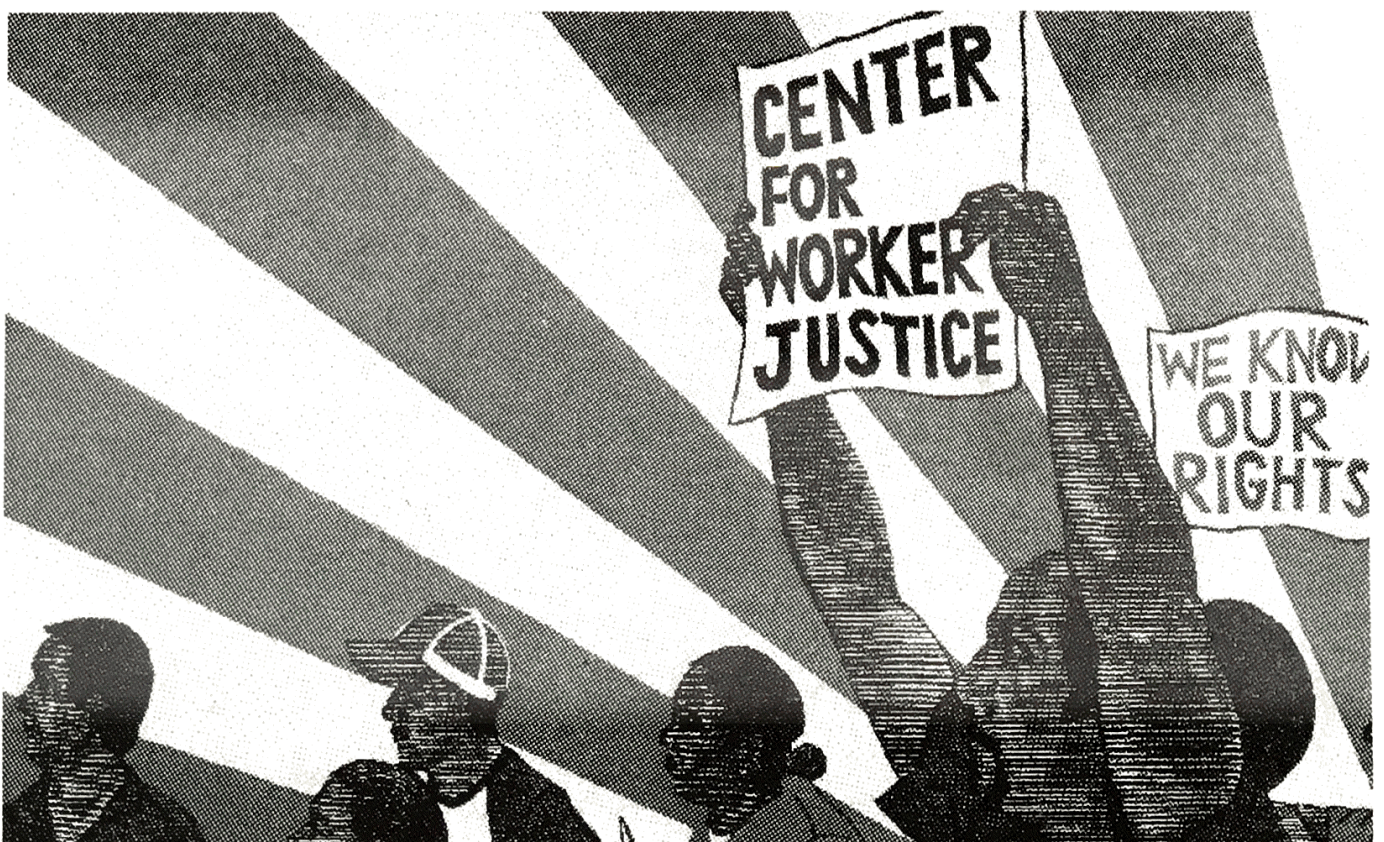


In high school in North Carolina, Fidencio won student awards for painting lush flowers and family members from the Mexico he had left behind at the age of seven when he crossed the border with the help of smugglers. Fidencio continued working in portraiture as an undergraduate at the Memphis College of Art. But, after being told by a professor that his work was “voyeuristic, in the sense that I was painting family members and others under the guise of talking about immigration but tiptoeing around the fact that I was also the subject of that very same conversation,” Fidencio began to openly create and speak about his own controversial immigration status as “undocumented.” At this point in his artistic practice, Fidencio says that he began “making work out of the biggest fear that I’ve had. And the biggest fear is just having those conversations about building walls, immigrants, because then it’s physical, I’m putting my body out there to be debated. I’m going to use these images because that is my biggest fear. I’ll make work out of that.”

In his work since, Fidencio has confronted his biggest fear by visually referencing immigrants, labor, borders, fences, nets, and walls. While pursuing two graduate degrees in Art at the University of Iowa, Fidencio realized that “in making art, we’re really privileged. So, it’s about thinking:

What can you do with that privilege, if you have that ability? In grad school, I worked with the Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa. They didn’t know that I made art. So, at first, I was just a member. And then they found out, and I made the logo, and posters, and a mural.” His art was energized by “talking and yelling at City Council” to ensure that workers in Iowa were paid fairly and consistently. He left Iowa with pride that his art had helped workers gain a \$10.10 minimum wage.

Since moving to Galveston, Fidencio has returned to painting portraits of plants, leaving aside his youthful voyeurism to instead reference surveillance, legal procedures, and evidence—he has begun painting these portraits onto envelopes instead of canvases or maps. His collection of envelopes includes some sent to him from his lawyers or from US Citizenship & Immigration Services to inform him of his Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. Since his final year as an undergraduate at Memphis College of Art, Fidencio has thrice applied and been granted the legal privilege to stay in the US. Though he just received notice in the mail that his DACA status has been renewed until 2019, Fidencio doesn’t feel secure. And so he paints portraits of his beloved plants onto envelopes that document his current location in case he ever has



Center for Worker Justice, a linocut Fidencio created for the Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa.



to leave the country he's called home for almost two decades. "That's why I'm painting them. Because I'm preparing to say goodbye to my home."

Before Fidencio leaves his home in Galveston at the end of his residency in July, the GAR cohort will visit West Texas



and Marfa. Living in Galveston is already the closest he has come to the border he crossed when he was 7. "People would ask me, 'Have you ever been to Texas?' And I'd say, 'Well...in the car, in a van. I don't know if in a van counts.' Well, yeah. This is the first time that I've ever been back. And then there's the Marfa trip. That's the setting, that's what it looks like. That's what the whole start of this journey looks like. So, I'm wondering what's going to happen, photography-wise. Maybe it's enough that I just collect the noises out there and bring them back. I don't know. Maybe I just cry." He clasps his hands, adjusts his beanie, crosses his legs at the ankles, leans back on his artist's desk, and sighs.

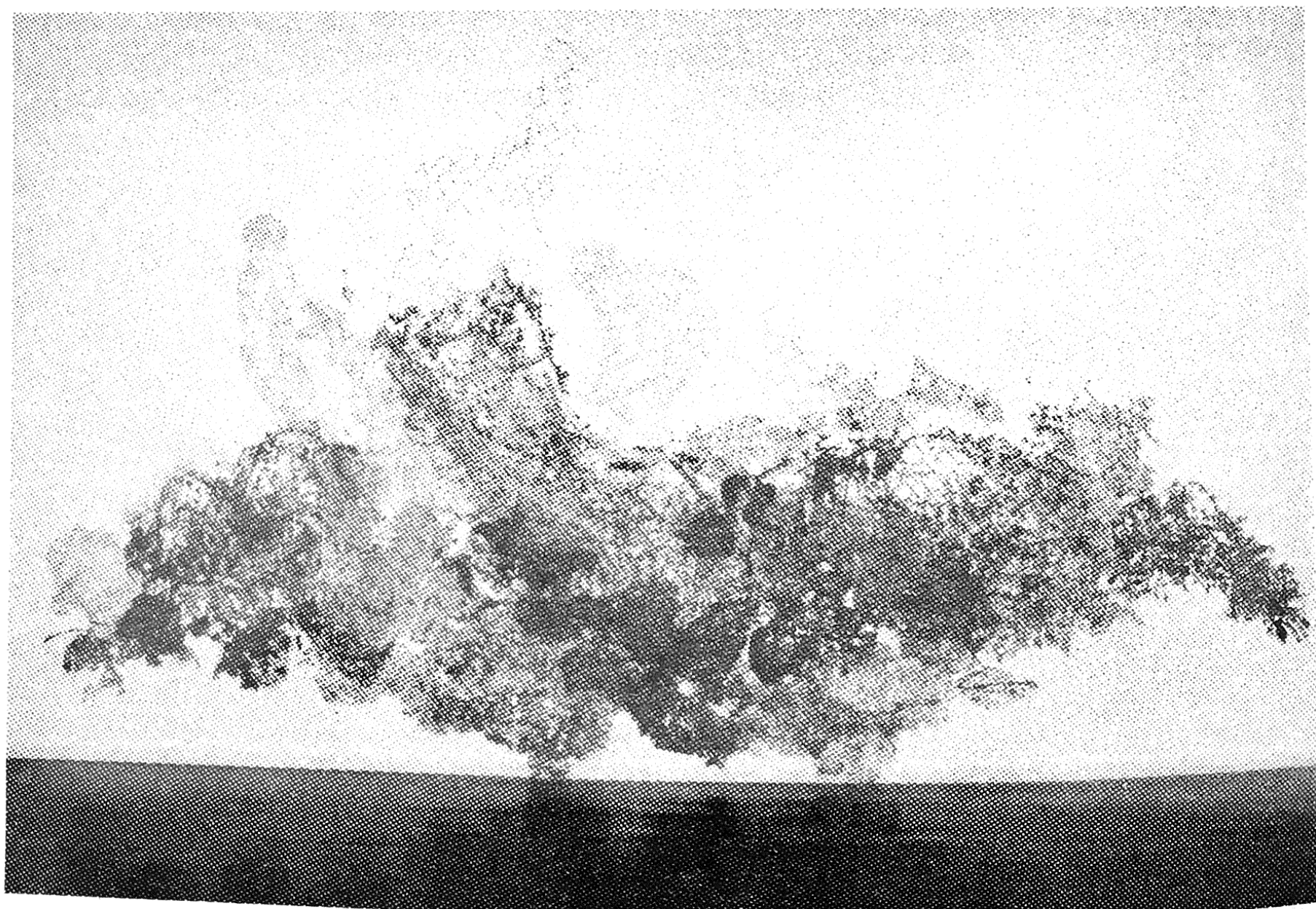
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**Experience:**

Fidencio's exhibition opens on June 3rd at Galveston Artist Residency



*El Hielo/I.C.E. from 2015, which was meticulously crafted out of cut maps, acrylic, ink, and map pins. Pictured above: Fidencio's series 39. El Nopal includes plant portraits of acrylic on found envelopes.*