



RAUL GONZALEZ TACO, TEXAS

October – December 14, 2018, Foyer Gallery



ALBRIGHT
Freedman Gallery

Taco, Texas is a previously recorded live performance by Raul Gonzalez. The piece was originally commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture for the City of San Antonio.¹ In this performance, Gonzalez pays homage to a performance by the great Pop artist, Andy Warhol: *Burger, New York*. Warhol's work was a vignette within a larger film about the American cultural landscape directed by Jørgen Leth titled *66 Scenes from America*.

In the film clip for *Burger, New York*, as in *Taco, Texas*, a simple one-camera shot faces the artist eating straight-on. In Warhol's case, he was eating a Burger King hamburger accompanied with some Heinz Ketchup. Nearly the entire film is without spoken dialogue until almost the end of the 4:27 minute film when the artist states, "Um, my name is Andy Warhol and I just finished eating a hamburger."

Warhol frequently bridged the world of commercial advertising with the avant-garde. He relished mainstream aesthetics and frequently used brands of everyday consumer products in his own work. He was such a fan of the machine-made and mass-produced items that he referred to his studio as The Factory. Therefore, to pair Warhol with the fast-food hamburger in this short film is seemingly the perfect marriage of artist to object. The hamburger became an all-American food staple, and by the 1950s some of the most famous fast-food chains opened, designed with a mass assembly production that were highly marketed to the middle-class consumer.

With Warhol's popularity, surely any burger company at the time would have loved to be featured in any project the artist took part in. More recently Beyoncé's mention of Red Lobster in her song "Formation" boosted sales for the restaurant by 33 percent.² Similarly, it is well understood that a celebrity's mention of a product can significantly aid in the increase of profits for the company.

In this case, the opposite happened when Gonzalez got the attention of the burger company based on his artwork. In March of this year, Whataburger, the fast-food chain that has a cult-like following particularly in Texas, ran a story about Gonzalez on its website noting his frequent use of an orange pigment that closely mimics the branding color of the popular chain.³

In *Taco, Texas*, Gonzalez updates the concept of the great American fast food cuisine by eating a taco with an array of accompanying salsas. Fitting since, hot sauce has become America's number one condiment, pushing ketchup to retreat from the spot.⁴ And in doing so, Gonzalez indirectly connects the change of diet to the transformation in the U.S. demographics with the large increase in the Latino population and projected future majority shifts. In dialogue with the new American cultural landscape, Gonzalez's employs a Mi Tierra take-out bag, a popular Tex-Mex restaurant for his symbolism. It is not a taco from Mexico that Gonzalez eats, rather it represents a cultural fusion — a yellow-cheese, flour-tortilla taco created in the states — the new all-American cuisine.

And unlike the bold delivery of product logo that Warhol provides the viewer in his film, the company-side of the packaging faces the artist in Gonzalez's performance, not the viewer. Later, when the bag is tossed to the side, only the most observant might discover the brand. Rather than a focus on consumerism and specific product, Gonzalez centers the viewer's attention on his daughter and this simple, subtle and sensitive juggle of eating (representing the balance of any quotidian activity with children) while caring for his child. As a stay-at-home father and full-time artist, Gonzalez has often incorporated his two girls into his practice.

In *Taco, Texas*, Gonzalez directly references art history in a reassessment of a performance that highlights both Latino culture and positive father figures — references that have been largely left out of the traditional art historical canon.

1 Performed live on July 19, 2017 at approximately 8:30 PM at Plaza de Armas in San Antonio, as part of the exhibition METADADA: High Art for the Populace.

2 "Beyoncé Song Lifts Sales 33% at Red Lobster Chain" The New York Times, Feb. 10, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/business/beyonce-song-lifts-sales-33-at-red-lobster-chain.html>

3 "Deep in the Art" Whataburger, Mar. 20, 2018. <https://stories.whataburger.com/deep-in-the-art/>

4 Gustavo Arellano. *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America* (New York: Schuster, 2012), 215.

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This artist has built a career using Whataburger as his inspiration



“WERK.
HUSTLE.
SLEEP.
WHATABURGER.”

Deep in the art

Whataburger, his dad, and hard work are the muses for this San Antonio artist

Raul Gonzalez is a Texas-based multidisciplinary artist working in drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking and performance art. Gonzalez studied graphic design and drawing at Washington University, St. Louis, received his B.F.A. in painting from the University of Houston, and an M.F.A. from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Gonzalez has been awarded a number of prestigious awards including the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures (NALAC) grant and the Surdna Foundation grant through

the Artist Lab at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. Most recently Gonzalez completed an artist-in-residency program at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts.

His artwork can be found within the collections of the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas; the National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago, Illinois; Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, Texas; National Hispanic Cultural Center Art Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Queens University, Charlotte, North Carolina, among others.

The Freedman Gallery at Albright College, named after former Albright trustee and alumna Doris Chanin Freedman, is located on the ground floor of the Center for the Arts. Since its inception, the gallery focuses primarily on contemporary, living American artists and hosts approximately twelve exhibitions each year rotating in the Main Gallery, Project Space and Foyer Gallery. Freedman Gallery is located at 13th & Bern Streets, Reading, Pa. 19612. Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sunday 1-4 p.m. The gallery is closed on Mondays, holidays, breaks and summer. (visit albright.edu/events-calendar).

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Cover image: **Raul Gonzalez**, Still from *Taco, Texas*, 2017, performance documentation