

CULTURE

Local students collaborate with Ballroom Marfa artist Guadalupe Maravilla on outdoor mural



Marfa High School senior and Ballroom Marfa intern Samantha Martinez Ramirez assists with the creation of a collaborative mural that is a part of the museum's latest exhibition Mariposa Relámpago. Staff photo by Mary Cantrell

BY MARY CANTRELL

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MARFA — The Ballroom Marfa courtyard was quiet one evening last week as three artists negotiated "liquid silver" paint pens against a purple-painted wall, taking turns adding and connecting free-form jagged, curvy and sharp lines.

Visiting artist Guadalupe Maravilla partnered with two Marfa High School students, senior Samantha Martinez Ramirez and freshman Josué Soto on the mural, part of his current exhibition *Mariposa Relámpago* at Ballroom Marfa.

Over the course of an hour the mural stretched to cover the surface's entirety, even venturing onto a neighboring wall. Its creation is based on a drawing game Maravilla played growing up in El Salvador called "Tripa Chuca," or rotting guts, where players connect sporadic numbered points on a page without overlapping other player's lines.

Maravilla said the exercise symbolizes the journey of migration, border crossing, and healing through shared experience.

He has played the game, generating unique murals each time, in other galleries and museums where he has shown work, often working with individuals who are undocumented. Maravilla said it is important for him to play with someone who is living in the area because it allows him to learn about how migration works in various geographical regions. He has played with individuals from Ghana, Syria and North Korea.

"That's what makes it really special for me, doing these during the shows, because I get to meet new people that have experience with migration, of many sorts, from all over the world," said Maravilla.

But Marfa's sparse population, proximity to the border, heavy law enforcement presence and Border Patrol checkpoints made involving undocumented individuals in the Ballroom Marfa mural impossible, he said.

The alternative plan to work with the Marfa High School students, who were both born in Mexico, was meaningful because all three of their energies will be embedded into the mural, reflecting intergenerational experiences of migration, said Maravilla, the work becoming somewhat of a shared fingerprint.

"We get into a conversation and get to know each other. It helps me understand the politics and the struggles of immigrants that come here," said Maravilla. "For example, immigrants arriving to New York, [that's] very different than immigrants coming here and [their] challenges."

Maravailla's sharp peaks were accompanied by Soto's more concentrated maze-like patterns and Martinez Ramirez's sometimes sinuous, sometimes chunky, graphics. The silver paint lines activated the newly-conceived mural, reflecting the light of the evening's sunset.

Upon stepping back to view the mural as a whole, Martinez Ramirez, who is also interning at Ballroom Marfa, said her contributions stood out to her, and it was interesting to see each artist's technique.

"I started off with just doing a line and when I saw [Maravilla] starting to do all the details and stuff, that's when I began to get the hang of it," said Martinez Ramirez.

"I didn't think it would be this big," she added. "There's lots of patterns, definitely not what I expected."

The spontaneously-produced mural remained visually cohesive with the largescale sculpture also on display in the courtyard, a chrome-plated school bus that is "equal parts sculpture, shrine and healing machine," according to a museum press release.

The intricate sculpture is made up of a total of 500 pieces and took Maravilla's team 10 days to install. It is outfitted with a number of gongs, which the artist and his team played during sound ceremonies for visitors at the exhibition opening Saturday night.

Gongs on one side of the bus display previous Tripa Chuca murals. The "vibrational healing instrument," as Maravilla refers to it, will head next to The Contemporary Austin art museum, then to the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston on its Texas tour.

