

Maria Guzmán
Capron Honors Mixed
Identities in the SECA
Art Award Exhibition



By Marissa
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As I walk into Maria Guzmán Capron's gallery at SFMOMA's 2022 SECA Art Award Exhibition, the first thing I notice is a giant foot in an orange room. Guzmán Capron fell in love with the gallery space and made large, bold hanging pieces. She wanted to make a space that was comfortable. The title of the show is something her mother always told her: *Respira Hondo*. The title is a way of expressing how to travel through your own body with your breath. Fabric pieces hang from the walls and the ceiling. Vibrant colors fill the room. Everything here adds to the feeling of a warm hug. When looking at her work I can smell home cooking. The work embodies everything I would feel in a Latin household. Every piece is made out of carefully selected fabric that reminds Guzmán Capron of the clothing she grew up with. She started off making pieces out of her daughter's outgrown clothing during the pandemic. The color and the fabric is all about showing how fabulous Latino/a/x are, by creating outfits that are colorful, expressive, and positive. Her works reference the stereotypes of Latino/a/x being "too much," but she then changes that trope from a negative to a positive.

Guzmán Capron takes us away from being othered and tacky to instead being colorful and positive. The figures portrayed on the pieces all have at least two faces, which represent the multiple sides of a person. Guzmán Capron is of mixed heritage and has a culturally diverse background: one parent is Colombian and the other is Peruvian, and she was born in Italy but moved to Texas when she was a teenager. In her work she portrays the many memories or sides of her history and personality. The cultural impact behind her work is rather strong, especially for immigrants living in the United States. Having been born in Italy, she had to hold onto her culture to keep it with her. Memories about her first time going to Peru with her mother greatly inspire her. She represents all sides of her heritage and life in her work, and never has to let go of her own identities in the process. She shows the multiple sides of the figures all in one, showing how even the figures are able to hold onto all the sides of their identities. She pieces together the different identities through the fabrics.

Her figures all have wavy looking hair which is generally found more in Latin cultures—our hair is not necessarily super curly or straight, it's usually a mixture. The hair style she uses is rather similar to her own hair; usually down and left natural. The patterns of the fabric remind me of the fabric that I grew up with. The way she sews things together shows a truly skillful hand and reminds people of the rich traditions of hand-making quilts, clothes and towels in Latina/o/x culture. The seams are carefully

quilted and the batting in between the fabric is perfectly spaced and amounted in the different sections. The amount of tradition that is put into her work is astounding. Every inch of her work is covered in the traditions of a Latina/o/x family. She shows the work in different ways to truly engage the viewer. Some are on the wall where you can go up and look at them, as if they are a portal into another world. Her suspended pieces are different. They exist in the same plane as we do, making them feel as if they are one with us and we are coexisting in a new world.

The curators were amazing and asked her if she wanted English translations of the works' titles, but Guzmán Capron preferred to keep the titles in Spanish. She remembered the time when she didn't speak English in high school and was learning a new language, and she wanted people to appreciate the way Spanish sounds and experience what it was like to be with the Spanish language. This refusal to hide who she is makes her work even more powerful. She shows that even if you title your work in a different language, it is your work and you should not feel like you have to translate it for anyone. Having people experience being amongst a different language can be incredibly powerful. Having a truly inspirational Latina like Guzmán Capron in the SECA show is something that will drive us to be the best we can and go as far as possible.



Maria A. Guzmán Capron, *Danza*, 2022
Photo by Marissa Tyler

Marissa Tyler is an MFA student at CCA and works with subject matter related to her large Mexican family. She is specifically interested in researching Latin cultures for her work.