

# In Colorful Portraits and Empty Landscapes, Two Artists Examine LGBT Culture in Peru

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Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo & Andrew Mroczek  
*Maricelo*, 2014  
McClain Gallery

“Canon,” an exhibition by collaborative artists Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo and Andrew Mroczek, functions on two very different levels. On one hand, it’s a celebration of Peru and its people, landscapes, and traditions. On the other, it’s a scathing critique of the country’s alarming disregard for LGBT rights.



Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo & Andrew Mroczek  
*Leyla*, 2014  
McClain Gallery

The exhibition, at McClain Gallery in Houston, features two series of photographs. The first is “Virgenes de la Puerta,” a lush series of images that, at first glance, looks reminiscent of religious iconography or traditional Spanish colonial portraiture. The feminine subjects appear in various states of undress; yet they aren’t strictly female. The subjects are members of Lima’s trans community.



Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo & Andrew Mroczek  
*Janny & Nuria*, 2015  
McClain Gallery

The series celebrates their resilience while also shining a light on Peru’s famous artisan traditions. The artist duo worked with local artisans to produce many of the objects pictured, including a 25-foot hand-crocheted veil and a gown featuring hundreds of embroidered flowers. “We wanted the women to be surrounded by everything that makes this country so unique and beautiful,” Barboza-Gubo has said.



Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo & Andrew Mroczek  
*Paolo*, 2015  
McClain Gallery



Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo & Andrew Mroczek  
*Nazia*, 2015  
McClain Gallery

Though the resulting images are beautiful, their inspiration came from a dark place. As a child, Barboza-Gubo, a native of Lima, witnessed the public beating of a transwoman on the city streets. Years later, in 2013, he was working on an exhibition, and Mroczek, a guest-based photographer and gallery director, was invited to Lima as its guest curator. After learning about the ongoing struggles of the Peruvian trans community—which has been repeatedly targeted for violence, rape, and murder—the two decided to collaborate on the “Virgenes de la Puerta” series.



Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo & Andrew Mroczek  
*Elias Neil Huaman Remache, 39 (Gay, Murdered, 2009), Throat slit with a shard of glass, his body ...*  
McClain Gallery

The extent of that violence is made explicit in images from the “Fatherland” series, on display side by side with “Virgenes.” The photographs look inoffensive, even mundane, as in images of empty street corners, garage doors, and quiet fields at night. But their titles tell a story, like *Yessica C. (Transgender, Survivor, 2010), Tied, beaten, gang-raped by four men and sodomized with objects—she was left to die on farmland, Pisco, Ica, Peru, 2015.* Or *Luis Fernando Vasquez Roque, 26 (Gay, Murdered, 2010), Wrists and ankles tied to his bed, strangled. He was found dead by his cousin. Calle Las Paltas 3992, Urbanización Naranjal, Lima, Peru, 2015.*



Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo & Andrew Mroczek  
*Yessica C. (Transgender, Survivor, 2010), Tied, beaten, gang-raped by four men and sodomized with ...*  
McClain Gallery

The brutal captions convey the artists’ searing political message. “We have all become so accustomed to seeing the lushness of Peru,” Barboza-Gubo has said. “But, in many cases, that beauty is a clear deception. And that deception exists because of our corrupt leaders and an overall lack of acceptance for those whose lives don’t fit within the structures they’ve developed.”

Their colorful celebration of the LGBTQ community is also a passionate plea to the powers that be, and an invitation for the world to wake up to a harsh reality hidden behind a beautiful culture.

—Bridget Gleeson

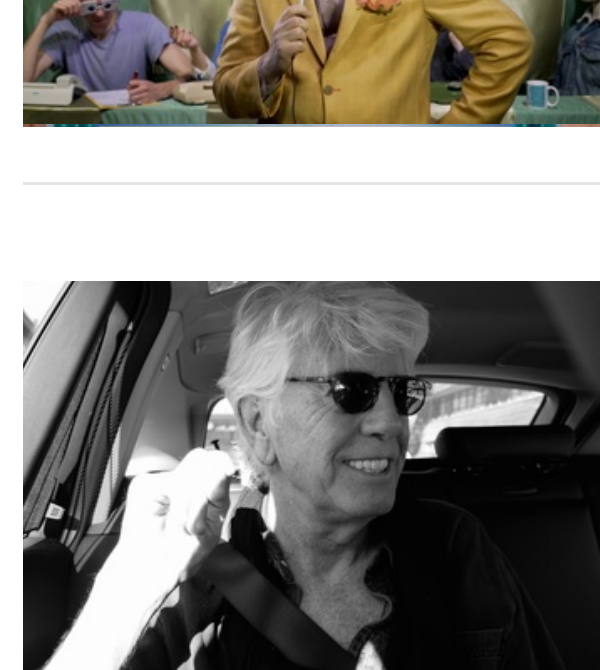
“Canon: Photographs by Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo & Andrew Mroczek” is on view at McClain Gallery, Houston, Mar. 19–May 14, 2016.

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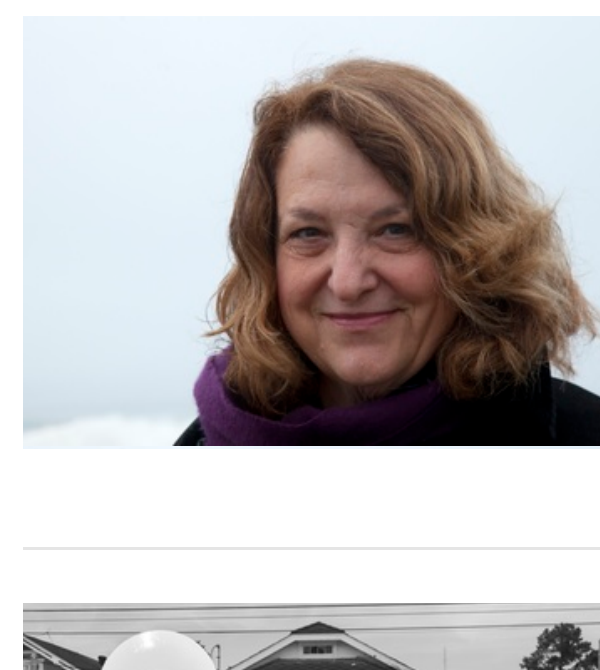
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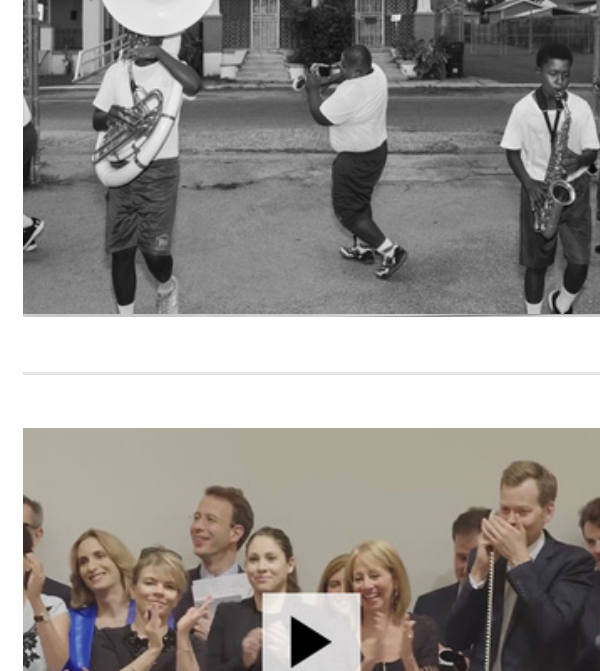
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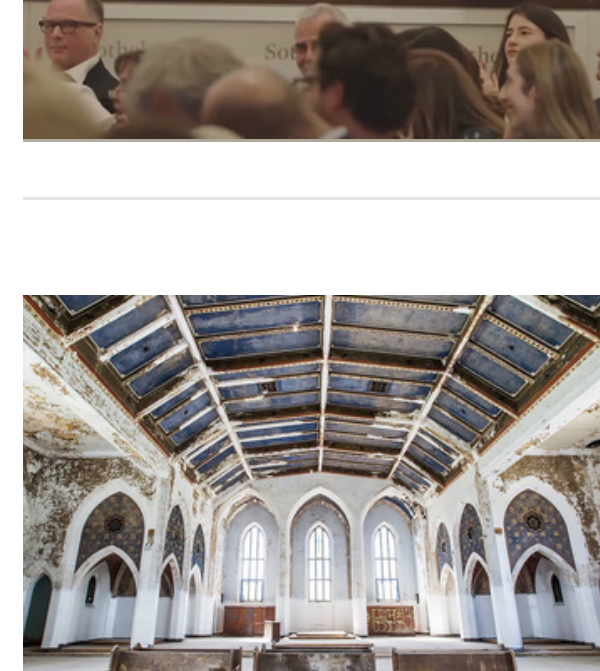
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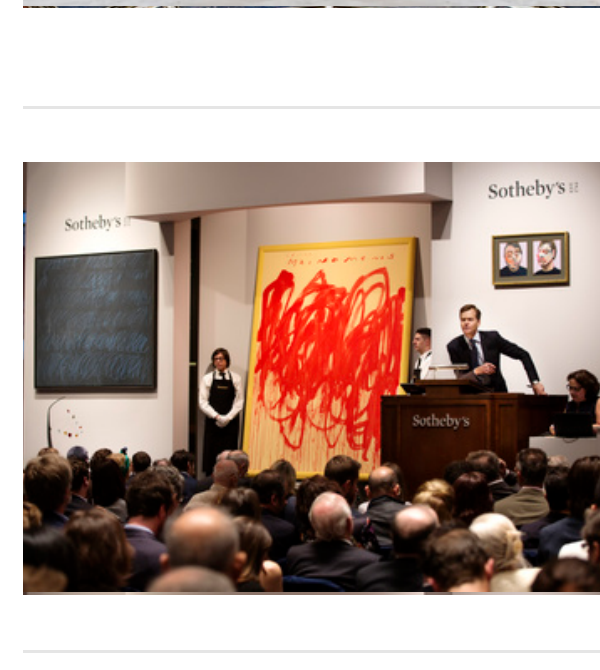
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