

## *Changarrito: Origins and Expectations from a Curator and Artist*

As the curator of exhibitions and programs for the Mexic-Arte Museum, I had to be open to innovative endeavors. Executive director Sylvia Orozco thrived on a nimble and reactive institutional vision of Latine cultural nuance. In 2012, she notified the staff that we would host the Changarrito project. Unfamiliar with the initiative, I had Sylvia explain what exactly I was to manage. In signature fashion, her explanation included drawing while speaking, a common practice in her brainstorming process. The drawing was a modest cart with light fixtures similar to a desk lamp. Perplexed by the prompt, I had a multitude of queries. Does the cart move? Can we have the artists be mobile throughout Austin's downtown? What were the parameters and expectations? In true institutional defiance of mainstream art spaces' rigid bureaucracy, BIPOC organizations have the unfettered realities of unprecedented vision. As such, Sylvia's response to my uncertainty reflected this constant: "We can do whatever we want."

My approach to the Changarrito project was to brand it as an artist residency project. A professional residency is a specific interaction between an artist and a new locale, often resulting in a site-specific production. The Changarrito falls into an ever-evolving space. Designed by artist Máximo González and based on the Mexican vending carts that punctuate street commerce, the Changarrito is a gallery, vending booth, *and* mobile art cart. The interaction between the invited artist and the cart depends entirely on the artist's imagination. Our only parameter was the cart's placement at the museum's front entrance.

San Antonio artist Louie Chavez was the first guest in the Changarrito at Mexic-Arte Museum residency program. His affordable pop-culture and 80s fantastical artworks translated to the accessible nature of Changarrito, offering a familiar visual gateway to passersby. The one-to-one interaction of public viewing and vending recalls the explanatory element of a studio tour,

the performance of one-to-one sales, and the unfiltered public reactions of a metropolitan downtown crowd. The many components of Changarrito resulted in varying inhabitations and interpretations by artists. For example, Artist Vincent Paul Martinez, Jr. added a live band performance to his residency in 2012. Local artist Randy Muñiz added elaborate chalk art to the public sidewalk in front of the cart. The Changarrito acted as a steppingstone and initial platform for the artists to incorporate additional forms and extensions to build off the cart. Mexic-Arte did not define the artist's price points, but the cart's diminutive size often led artists to create smaller, affordable works for portability and community access. Miniature toys, paintings, prints, jewelry, and zines made up the menageries of artistic offerings. With each artist, Sylvia purchased works from the artist, developing a new chapter of the museum's collection.

After my departure in 2014, I continued my connection to the Changarrito project, and I was an invited artist in 2016 and 2018. In this aspect, I focused on BIPOC zines, paintings, and miniature artwork from my independent practice. As part of my collective, Puro Chingón, we continued our sales of zines, prints, and toys. Each of my projects is aimed at community financial accessibility, acting as an appropriate continuation of Changarrito's Mexican *mercado* origins. Passersby were always curious about what they were looking at in front of the museum. While the phenomenology of a museum exhibition space experience is familiar to most, the part booth and gallery orientation of the Changarrito poised a visual conundrum: one that coaxed visitors to partake in a Mexican legacy of informal commerce. What exactly were they looking at as they interacted with the cart? Now poised with the experience as a Changarrito curator and artist, Sylvia's original accented statement reverberates as an undeniable truth and the evident answer to the aforementioned question of what Changarrito is: the project is whatever you want it to be.