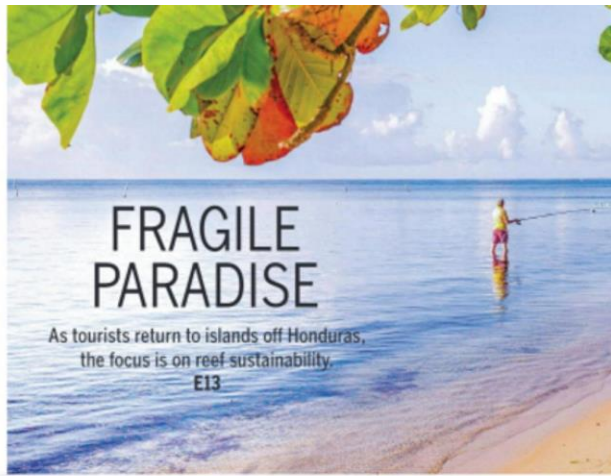




ARTISTS HONORED

The winners of the annual San Diego Art Prize have been announced.
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The San Diego Union-Tribune

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ARTS + CULTURE **SUN DAY**

ARTS

Art Prize boosts local artists

This year's recipients — **Alida Cervantes, Angélica Escoto, Carlos Castro Arias, Misael Diaz and Amy Sanchez Arteaga** — were chosen by national and international curators

BY SETH COMBS

The annual San Diego Art Prize has morphed and transformed, both in the way in which the prize is awarded and in what it means when artists win the prize.

Founded in 2006 by the San Diego Visual Arts Network, the prize was originally awarded to two established artists and two emerging artists. Those artists would then be paired up to work on a joint exhibition.



Art Prize honoree local artist

SAN DIEGO ART PRIZE

For the last few years, however, the San Diego Art Prize has simply been awarded to regional artists whose "outstanding achievements in the field of visual arts merit the recognition." Chi Essary, who became the Art Prize curator and administrator in 2019, says she sees the prize as something that continues to evolve, and for this year's nominees, she made it a point to make it more of a service to the artists beyond simply winning the award.

"The whole idea was to figure out a way to bring more value and meaning to the artists, and to the arts community at large," Essary says. "How do we bring more attention to the region and share the talent we have here with the world. We all know and love these artists and how much talent we have here."

Essary says she was brainstorming ideas of ways in which they could bring attention to both the Art Prize and the recipients when a colleague suggested that she try a more novel approach for selecting the winners. She asked 17 local artists, arts writers (full disclosure: I was asked to submit nominees), curators and arts professionals to come up with a list of 18 nominees. That list was sent to the four national and international curators to select the winners.

Essary says that this new method of choosing the winners has already proved to be fruitful. "There was a lot of interest and excitement, and that was really inspiring," says Essary, who adds that one of the curators has already reached out to one of the recipients for a blog post. "Even though they only choose four artists, all of the nominees are in their mental Rolodex now. They know about those artists, and that's priceless."

The four national and international curators are Jovanna Venegas (assistant curator of contemporary art at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art); Marcela Guerrero (assistant curator at the Whitney Museum in New York); Amy Galpin (chief curator at the Frost Art Museum in Florida); and José Springer (an independent curator based in Mexico City and Vienna). Collectively they chose four recipients for this year's prizes.

The winners are painter Alida Cervantes, multidisciplinary artists Angélica Escoto and Carlos Castro Arias, and public art duo Cognate Collective (Misael Diaz and Amy Sanchez Arteaga).

"I have been living in San Diego for seven years, and it is good to know that my work is being recognized in this cultural environment," says Arias, who is originally from Colombia and works as an associate professor at San Diego State University. "I think that having a jury from different backgrounds is an interesting element of this prize."

"We are very grateful to the four curators that served as the selection jury for the prize," Cognate Collective agreed in a joint statement sent via email. "We hope that this sort of engagement across cities and countries can facilitate opportunities for collaboration and contribute to expanding gestures of solidarity between our arts communities."

One thing all the winners have in common is that they're representative of the binational identity of the region. That is, all four of the Art Prize recipients live, work or practice in both San Diego and Tijuana. What's more, their work, in varying ways, deals in themes of that binational identity.

"It's definitely great to see artists from both sides of the border being recognized and, in this case, all Latinx artists," says Cervantes, a Mexican artist whose work explores "the power relations between race, class, gender and even species."

In addition to a cash prize, the Art Prize winners' work will be exhibited at a joint exhibition opening Sept. 17 at the San Diego Central Library Art Gallery. And they will be collectively exhibited at the annual Art San Diego art fair, which also opens in September. All four artists confirm that they will be producing new work for both exhibitions.

Ultimately, Essary says that it was "heartening" to see how the four curators responded to the work and that she sees the Art Prize serving as something of a "mediator" to continue to introduce local artists to national and international curators and

"It's exciting to see what they're excited about and what grabbed their attention," Essary says. "Because they're not here — it's completely unbiased and based solely on what they gravitate toward."

Combs is a freelance writer.



Above:
Alida
Cervantes

Left:
Angélica
Escoto



Carlos
Castro
Arias



Cognate •
Collective
(Misael
Diaz and
Amy
Sanchez
Arteaga)