



Nivia Gonzalez

A native of San Antonio, Nivia Gonzalez left Texas in 1966 in favor of Greenwich Village. She attended Cooper Union for a time on a full scholarship, and from there, her trek led her to Miami and later to Houston. She earned her B.A. in Studio Art from Trinity University in San Antonio in 1983 and her M.A. in Art Education from The University of Texas at Austin in 1987.

Nivia credits her family for forging the creative energies within her. Her grandmother was an art teacher in Mexico, and her father was a natural storyteller. As a young child, she and her father would select words and phrases and playfully construct short stories together. By the age of seven, Nivia was writing and illustrating poems. Nivia's appreciation of the bold colors that characterize her work are a gift from her mother. Schooled in interior design, Nivia's mother saw to it that the family home was filled with bold, never muted, colors that were always changing.

Nivia draws much of her inspiration from her twin daughters, who feature in many of her paintings:

Years ago, when my kids were younger, I used to have them underpaint and it would leave impressions... I would then paint based on the smudges my kids had left.

Nivia has received national and international acclaim for her artwork. In 1986, Nivia launched the Bexar County Jail Arts Program in San Antonio, spending 20 hours a week teaching inmates to paint. With her guidance, the inmates created a 10'x15' mural of la Virgen de Guadalupe that was used as a backdrop when Pope John Paul II visited San Antonio in 1987. She was inducted into the San Antonio Women's Hall of Fame in 1996 and has provided artwork for the covers of books by renowned authors including Alice Walker and Sandra Cisneros.

Her career came to a tragic halt one night in 1997:

...after my car broke down on the highway, I began to try to cross the freeway on foot in search of help. I was then struck by a truck pulling horses and I was thrown 50 feet up in the air. My family was told that I literally died three times en route to the trauma center. Because of the traumatic brain injury that I suffered, or perhaps the stroke that I also suffered, when I came out of my coma, I was unable to walk or talk. I lost the use of the left side of my body. To me the worst injury I suffered was that I was now unable to paint because I am a left-handed artist.

Nivia continues to suffer from memory loss and limited mobility on the left side. She spent over a decade recovering from this debilitating accident, unable to paint. She slowly regained control of her left hand and began painting again by making tiny strokes on the canvas:

You've heard of all the people like Jesse Treviño who learn to paint with their other hand. Not me. I just waited and waited until I got the feeling back in my left hand. Sometimes I have to hold my left hand—put my right hand under my left arm—so I can reach the canvas, but I just wanted to paint the way God made me to paint, with my left hand.

These painstaking efforts eventually blossomed into many of the beautiful pieces displayed on this website.

Now residing in Austin amidst “glorious trees in a huge yard,” Nivia paints in her light-filled home studio, continually thanking God for her spiritual strength, which she says helped her believe she could recover, as she repeatedly told herself, “You can beat this, you know you can.”

Now I know what it's like to lose time. I literally lost 10 years of my life. Just now, I'm beginning to wake up, as if from a long, rather unpleasant dream. Now I am focusing on things that really matter and the astounding beauty of life. For some reason, I'm happy every day that I wake up. I'm so glad really, just to be alive, even at 60 plus. Mine is a wonderful life in my home on top of a hill in Austin, Texas.

Nivia Gonzalez

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Education

- 1968 B.A. Studio Art, Trinity University, San Antonio, TX
- 1975 M.A. Art Education, The University of Texas at Austin

Accomplishments/Honors/Awards

- 1985 Cover art for Arte Publico Press
Rituals of Survival: A Woman's Portfolio by Nicholasa Mohr
Woman, Woman by Angela de Hoyos
- 1985 National Hispanic Scholarship Fund recipient for three years
- 1985 Commissioned to produce limited edition lithographs, San Antonio Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts
- 1988 Annual report cover, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
- 1988 Commissioned to produce limited edition lithographs, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
- 1988 Christmas card design, Congressional Hispanic Caucus
- 1988 Christmas card design, Mexican American Women's National Association, Washington, DC
- 1988 Christmas card design, Hispanic Designers Institute (fellow contributors included Paloma Picasso and Carolina Herrera)
- 1988 Nominee, Artist of the Year Award, Business Committee for the Arts, San Antonio
- 1988 Outstanding Achievement in the Arts Award, Mexican American Women's National Association, Washington, DC
- 1988 Hidalgo Award for Outstanding Service to the Community, Bexar County Commissioner's Court, San Antonio
- 1988 Metropolitan Museum of Art Scholarship recipient
- 1988 Curator and participating artist, Navarro Council for the Arts, Corsicana, TX
- 1988 First Place, Juried Latina Indígenas Women's Art Exhibit, Mexican Cultural Institute, San Antonio
- 1989 One of Hispanic Magazine's "Outstanding Women of the Year"
- 1989 Nominee, Texas State Artist of the Year
- 1989 Mistress of Ceremonies and Participating Artist, Texas Women's Art Fair, San Antonio
- 1990 Cover art for Random House publication *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros
- 1990 Cover art for Arte Publico Press publication *Short Stories by Latin American Woman: The Magic and the Real*, edited by Celia Correias de Zapata
- 1990 Official poster, ArtExpo, Los Angeles
- 1991 Cover art for Random House publication *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* by Sandra Cisneros

- 1991 Cover art for Arte Publico Press publication *Communion* by Pat Mora
- 1991 Commissioned to produce graphics for Santa Fe Hotel, Euro Disney, Paris
- 1991 "Alma, Corazón y Vida" Multi-Media/Multi-Cultural Art of Women for the Western Hemisphere, Rome
- 1992 Cover art for Random House publication *Three Filipino Women* by Jose F. Sionil
- 1993 Member, Board of Directors, Cultural Arts Council of Houston
- 1993 Official poster design for "Year of the Woman," Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Washington, DC
- 1994 Commissioned to produce limited edition lithographs for Guatemalan film "El Silencio de Neto"
- 1994 Moderator, Mexican American Cultural Center Planning Committee, Austin
- 1994 Consultant for Taylor Hackford film "Bound by Honor/Blood In Blood Out"
- 1994 Catalogue cover, Santilla Publishing
- 1995 Cover art for Arte Publico Press publication *Havana Thursdays* by Virgil Suárez
- 1995 Hall of Fame Inductee, Hispanic Women in Leadership, Houston
- 1995 Brillante Award, 75 Most Influential Hispanics in Texas, Houston
- 1995 Cover art for Avon's "Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month" ad, Hispanic Magazine
- 1995 Poster design, Hispanic Women in Leadership, Houston
- 1995 Poster design, Annual Conference, Puerto Rican/Hispanic State Legislature, Rochester, NY
- 1995 Poster design, "Daughters of the Fifth Sun," Hispanic Women's Conference, St. Mary's University, San Antonio
- 1995 Poster designs, New York Graphics Society
- 1995 Poster design, 13th Annual U.S. Hispanic Leadership Conference, Chicago
- 1995 Poster design, National Peace Corps Association Conference, Austin
- 1996 Cover art for Arte Publico Press publication *Centaur of the North* by Wendell Mayo
- 1996 Inductee for Creative Arts, San Antonio Women's Hall of Fame
- 1999 Cover art for Ballantine Books publication *By the Light of My Father's Smile* by Alice Walker
- 2001 Cover art for Arte Publico Press publication *The Memories of Ana Calderón* by Graciela Limón
- 2003 Panel member, "A Latina Celebration!," The Smithsonian Center for Latino Initiatives
- 2004 Recipient, The Chicano Hispanic Law Students Award for Spirit of Culture, Austin
- 2011 Cover design, Journal for Minority Medical Students, Spectrum Publishers
- 2011 Cover art for Arte Publico Press publication *Las Memorias de Ana Calderón* by Graciela Limón

Solo Exhibitions

- 1964 Witte Museum, San Antonio
- 1985 "Mira...The Canadian Club Hispanic Tour"
Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, San Francisco
- 1985 El Museo del Barrio, New York
- 1985 San Antonio Museum of Art
- 1985 Plaza de la Raza, Los Angeles

- 1985 Hyde Park Arts Center, Chicago
- 1985 Cuban Museum of Art and Culture, Miami
- 1990 Dagen Bela Galleria, San Antonio
- 1991 Dagen Bela Galleria, San Antonio
- 1991 Adagio Galleries, Palm Springs
- 1992 Adagio Galleries, Palm Springs
- 1992 E.S. Lawrence Gallery, Taos
- 1992 Jack Meier Gallery, Houston
- 1993 Adagio Galleries, Palm Springs
- 1993 Contemporary Southwest Galleries, Santa Fe
- 1994 Jack Meier Gallery, Houston
- 1995 Adagio Galleries, Palm Springs
- 1995 Contemporary Southwest Galleries, Santa Fe
- 2005 La Peña, Austin
- 2007 Adagio Galleries, Palm Springs
- 2009 Galeria Ortiz Contemporary, San Antonio

Group Exhibitions

- 1985 "Hispanic Women Artists of Texas," Corpus Christi, TX
- 1987 "Influences," San Antonio Museum of Art
- 1988 First Annual Hispanic Art Auction, Benefit for South Central Family Health Center, Los Angeles
- 1988 "Mujeres y Artistas," La Peña, Austin and Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, San Antonio
- 1989 "Art to Heart," Benefit for Bexar County Hospital District, San Antonio
- 1990 First Annual Invitational, Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis
- 1991 "Four Faces West," Museum of Art of the American West, Houston
- 1992 Nanette Richardson Fine Art, San Antonio
- 1992 Joy Tash Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ
- 1993 Art Incorporated, San Antonio
- 1993 Joy Tash Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ
- 1994 The University of Texas at Austin
- 1995 Art Americas, Miami
- 1995 Martin-Rathburn Gallery, San Antonio
- 2002 "Toma Mi Corazón X" Silent Auction and Benefit, La Peña, Austin
- 2006 Adagio Galleries, Palm Springs, CA
- 2008 "Mujeres en Nepantla," La Peña, Austin
- 2011 Vasundhara 17th Annual Border Book Festival, Galería Tepín, Mesilla, NM

Publications

- 1988 "Beauty and the Beast," Hispanic Magazine
- 1990 "Nivia Gonzalez Profiled," Southwest Art Magazine
- 1990 "Nivia Gonzalez: A Voice of Humanity," Sun Storm Magazine
- 1990 "Images of Paradise," Cover story, ArtExpo

- 1990 "San Antonio: Hometown of Texas," Southern Living Magazine
- 1990 "Viviencias y Emociones de una Pintora de Tejas," La Opinión
- 1991 "Getting to the Art of the Matter," Trinity University Alumni Edition
- 1992 "Artist Covers Changing Image of Women and Looks Ahead," Houston Chronicle
- 1992 "Nivia Gonzalez, Hispanic Artist," Cover story, Uptown Express
- 1993 "Nivia Gonzalez: A Passion for Color Beginning in Childhood," SantaFean
- 1994 "Artist Keeps a Fast Pace," Austin American-Statesman
- 1994 "A Woman for All Seasons," Houston Chronicle
- 1994 "Art Values and Common Threads," SantaFean
- 1995 Cover story, Texas Hispanic Magazine
- 2004 "A New Outlook on Life, Art," Austin American-Statesman