

Greg Kucera and Frye Art Museum: Uplifting Regional Talent

The Frye Art Museum is a pillar in the Seattle's arts community, and has been involved with the Seattle Art Fair as a cultural partner from the beginning.

The Frye's commitment to support and grow the region's arts community is demonstrated through the Frye Art Museum | Artist Trust Consortium. Since 2014, Artist Trust has worked with the Frye Art Museum and Raynier Institute & Foundation to offer the [James W. Ray Venture Project Award](#) to exceptional artists living and working in Washington State. The award is comprised of a \$15,000 prize and an exhibition, artistic program, or series held at the Frye.

Walla Walla artist Juventino Aranda received the award in 2016 and his exhibition [Pocket Full of Posies](#), currently on display at the Frye, is his first solo exhibition at a major museum. In *Pocket Full of Posies*, Aranda highlights the social, political, and economic struggles of Chicanos in the United States. With his work, he is interested in exploring how everyday objects, especially those associated with Mexican heritage, are invested with various personal, social, and historical meanings.



Birds of a Feather by Juventino Aranda hangs in the hallway of the Frye Art Museum in the *Pocket Full of Posies* exhibition.

Entering the exhibition at the Frye, viewers are immediately met by a pair of bronze cast sneakers hanging over a coated cable. The shoes have dual meaning, according to the Frye's curator Amanda Donnan.

Shoes dangling from telephone wires are a common occurrence in urban neighborhoods, but the reason behind the action is frequently debated.

"Similar to the song *Ring Around the Rosie* from which Juventino derived his title, shoes hanging on street wires are a phenomenon that people don't understand very well," Donnan explains. "*Ring Around the Rosie* is thought to be about the black plague, but more recently experts have said that it's probably a newer invention that doesn't have a specific referent."

"Juventino is very interested in the different interpretations and layers of symbolism surrounding everyday objects," she states.

Farther into the exhibition, an enormous votive candle stands in the middle of the room. Frequently used by Catholics to honor saints, votive candles were iconic to Aranda's childhood growing up with his mother and grandmother.



Juventino Aranda's piece *America (El Dia que Llego La Llorona)* represents votive candles used to honor saints.

"Juventino talks about the work in terms of candles dedicated to the Virgin Guadalupe," said Donnan. "His mother and grandmother kept these candles burning in their houses at all times. As one candle began to burn out, they would quickly swap in another and light it."

“Juventino remembers feeling acute anxiety as the candles came to their end,” she explains. “He was worried that something bad might happen in the interim before another was lit.”

In addition to the personal aspect, the piece’s title *America (El Dia que Llego la Llorona)* weaves in a Mexican folktale about La Llorona, a cautionary tale warning children against staying out late. Aranda extends this idea to the U.S. criminal justice system.

“Juventino thinks about La Llorona in terms of systemic racism and the disproportionate targeting of people of color,” said Donnan. “La Llorona relates to how mothers are praying for their children that might be lost in the streets or incarcerated. It adds another layer to the piece.”

In addition to Aranda’s current exhibition at the Frye, Greg Kucera, a well-respected Seattle art gallerist, also represents him.

In 2015, Kucera was invited to jury the 60th Annual Central Washington Artists’ Exhibition in Yakima, where he first became acquainted with Aranda’s work.

“Finding Juventino was a moment of revelation for me,” said Kucera. “I wasn’t familiar with him, but his work was so complete. For an emerging artist, his work was incredibly sophisticated and mature. I was extremely impressed.”

During the exhibition, Aranda was awarded as Best of Show by Kucera. From that moment, their relationship began to flourish.

“I told him I wanted to do an exhibition with him,” said Kucera. “Very rarely do I have an immediate reaction to someone’s work, but I knew almost immediately that I wanted to work with him.”

In 2016, Kucera officially began to represent Aranda, showcasing his work in both group and solo exhibitions in his gallery. This year, he will bring Aranda’s work to the Seattle Art Fair.

“I used to focus more on artists with established reputations around the country, but there is really great regional talent that is worthwhile to showcase,” said Kucera. “I decided to shift the focus of the gallery to finding those artists. I want to make connections with the ones I can really help grow and refine their careers.”



Juventino Aranda's Pendleton Blanket (H 57" x W 77" x D 2") will be showcased at Greg Kucera's booth during the Fair.
*At time of publication, piece is untitled.

This year, the Seattle Art Fair is deepening its relationship with the Frye Art Museum through a recently announced [acquisitions fund](#) that will help grow their permanent collection and further the Fair's engagement with Seattle's cultural community year-round.

Be sure to visit the Frye Art Museum to view Aranda's first major solo exhibition on display now through September 23 and see additional works by Juventino, along with other regional artists, at the Greg Kucera Gallery booth at the Fair.

Seattle Art Fair tickets are available [here](#).