

Everson



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A DASH OF *Paprika*

For Miami-based artist Pepe Mar, collage is a mechanism of transformation—and the origin story of the fiery character he calls his alter-ego: *Paprika*.

It all began with an effortless sketch on a paper napkin. Then Mar turned to collage, cutting out contrasting paper images to form the figure in a flat composition. After years of play, the figure's body has changed and mutated into the anthropomorphic embodiment of Mar, which manifests in many of his works.

"When you draw and doodle you eventually come up with a personal style," Mar said. "That's kind of similar to what I did with collaging for so many years. And that's how the character, *Paprika*, was created."

Paprika is Mar's way of compressing his personal obsessions—science fiction, fashion, queer and subcultural history, and more—explored through his immersive and experimental practice. Altogether, his work, which ranges from sculpture to works on paper, plumbs the sentiments of cultural alienation, both from a personal and universal perspective. In the past five years, assemblage has been the main focus of Mar's work—a practice that binds found objects, ephemera, personal belongings, and paper collage into vibrant, multi-dimensional pieces equally as profound in meaning.

Pepe Mar (b. 1977 in Mexico, lives in Miami)

Border Crosser, 2021

Mixed media on wood in artist's Plexi box
75 x 60 inches

Everson Museum of Art, Museum Purchase
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Photo courtesy of: David Castillo Gallery, Miami



Born in Mexico, the artist grew up surrounded by an arts scene brimming with vibrancy, texture, and cultural crafts. From a young age, Mar has intuitively collected found materials and transformed them into art. “Becoming an artist was something that happened very naturally,” Mar said. In the 90s, Mar’s family migrated to Texas, where he attended high school. Soon after, he pursued the beginnings of his artistic career in San Francisco as a BFA student at California College of Arts and Crafts.

Everson guests may recognize Mar’s spirited *doppelgänger* in his dynamic, life-size assemblage, *Border Crosser*, one of several assemblage works featured in his upcoming solo exhibition on view from September 30 through December 31. *Border Crosser* was one of many new acquisitions made by the Everson during Miami’s Art Week in late 2021.

The artist hails from Reynosa, a city that lies along the Mexico-U.S. border. “Growing up in a place like that is much

different than living in Mexico away from the border,” Mar said in an interview with lifestyle magazine, *VoyageMIA*. “You always grow up with the influence of America but also having your roots in Mexico.” *Border Crosser* is a self-portrait that echoes Mar’s experience migrating to the United States and eventually settling in Miami, Florida, where he’s lived and worked for 22 years.

Contained by a red shadowbox, Mar fuses flamboyant objects like a faux flowers,



glazed ashtrays, and ceramics secured with snake-like forms into the shape of a *Paprika*. Behind the assemblage, paper collages of the character twist, mutate, and duplicate. Many of the objects Mar used to assemble *Border Crosser* can be traced back to thrift stores, however the artist also included some of his own belongings, like the orange-laced combat boots worn by *Paprika* that Mar once used for travel. “I was obsessed with those boots for so many years,” Mar said. Collecting is the pulse of Mar’s practice.

The artist begins most days with trips to numerous thrift stores, antique shops or flea markets around Miami to scavenge found materials that he feels drawn to. “It’s a way for me to engage in a different way with the world,” Mar said. “When I’m not alone in the studio, I’m out shopping and looking for all these materials to include in these assemblages.”

The paper-based materials—or ephemera—that form his collages can be traced back to books, encyclopedias, and magazines, which Mar says are becoming more difficult to acquire with the decline of print media. “It’s almost like people don’t want to live with books anymore,” Mar said. “So there’s a big injection of that into my work.”

A grouping of found objects is inherently dissonant. So, to harmonize these components, Mar seeks soft and malleable materials—such as leather or fabric—to fasten objects together into his assemblages.

In a recent trip to Central New York, Mar visited Syracuse Antiques Exchange and acquired a duck-shaped ceramic tray he envisions as a mouth of a *Paprika*. To localize his work to the Everson community, Mar says he plans to include this object into one of the five new assemblages he will create to coincide with *Border Crosser*.

“What I like about my work is that there’s nuance to it,” Mar said. “You can read about this idea of cultural alienation or the cyborg—but it also could be about a lot of other things. It will be interesting to see how people in Syracuse see the work.”

As an admirer of ceramics, Mar says he’s thrilled to collaborate with the Everson, an institution that prides itself on being one of the leading hubs of ceramics research and exhibitions in the country. Mirroring the curatorial practices he wields daily as an artist, Mar will organize part of the exhibition himself by selecting ceramic vessels and other works from the Museum’s collection to be placed in dialogue with his explosive collages and assemblages. Vessels can be used to store matter in the same way *Paprika* manifests all of Mar’s crazes.

“Every ceramicist makes a vessel at some point—and I think the relationship between the vessel and my work is the character, *Paprika*,” Mar says. “It’s basically a vessel where you put all your obsessions.”

—by Natalie Paris Rieth,
Curatorial Intern

Photo:
Courtesy of
David Castillo Gallery, Miami

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