

EL QUE NO ARRIESGA, NO GANA A LOCAL MUSIC PRODUCER AND HIS ROAD TRAVELED TO TWO LATIN GRAMMYS

# THE BEND

COASTAL BEND LIFE

# THE ARTIST ISSUE





# CANDID CONVERSATIONS WITH FOUR LOCAL ARTISTS FROM

## ISOLATION

BY: KYLIE COOPER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY: LILLIAN REITZ

What does creativity in crisis look like? The answer is undoubtedly different depending on whom you ask. Some have flourished in the solitude, while others found mental roadblocks in the unknown, impeding their inspiration. Curious about art and creation amidst isolation, we looked to four local artists, with vastly different points of view, to extend the discussion. Beautifully gifted artists Meg Aubrey, Mark Clark, Robin Hazard, and Joe Peña sent us a message – a dispatch from isolation, if you will – to help describe how we might all be feeling right now. And when those words fail, thankfully, we'll always have tubes of paint to communicate with.

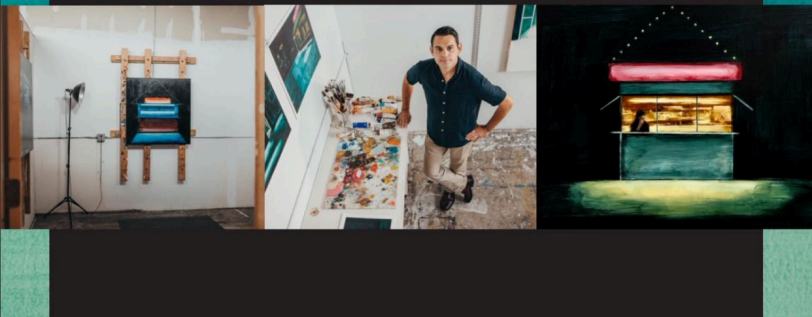


# JOE PEÑA



Joe Peña's rich depictions of Mexican heritage are undoubtedly recognizable. Ideals such as family, tradition, and culture are strung through each of his paintings, creating an identity within the artist's works that feels relatable and familiar – like opening a window into his home and life. From a series of meat paintings inspired by his culture to urban landscapes, his work tells a story. One you feel compelled to shut up and listen to. Even prior to COVID-19, his work stimulated the notion of isolation. Now that remoteness is at the forefront of everyone's mind, the theme feels especially relevant and allows not only his work, but also his own self, to feel more open to interpretation than ever before.

Original piece inspired by working in isolation.  
**CLOSURE, 20" X 13", INK ON YUPO PAPER, 2020**



## ARTIST INTERVIEW

**KYLIE COOPER:** What is your first cognizant memory when it comes to creating art?

**JOE PEÑA:** My mother, Elva, was always sketching beautiful little portraits and I was mesmerized by what she could do. My father, Nelson, also drew these funny little cats. I would trace both of their drawings constantly. After that, I continued to draw all the time. I guess it was working, because I remember in the fourth grade, we were given an assignment to draw something from a children's book, and I drew a small mouse in a boat. It was a simple little sketch, really, but knowing that I would often trace drawings, some classmates accused me of doing so for the assignment and informed the teacher. She then took my drawing and placed it on the page of the book to see if I had indeed traced it, [but] my image was larger than the one in the book. I still remember how to draw that funny little mouse in that boat.

**KC:** What would you say is your main medium, and is it the same as your favorite medium to work in?

**JP:** Really, I'm a fan of all mediums and have worked in a majority – from acrylic to encaustic. However, my primary medium is oil paint and my other favorite is ink. Oil is rich, luminous, and forgiving. Ink is intense, transparent, and can also be forgiving if used properly. The funny thing is that I went back to ink as a primary medium when my twins were born, as I wasn't able to get to my studio as often to continue my oil paintings. After struggling with it for some time, I finally gave up and allowed the ink to do what it wanted to. I eventually enjoyed the results so much that I am now trying to get my oil paintings to look like my ink paintings!

**KC:** Were there ever moments of doubt about being a career artist?

**JP:** There were, and still are, constant doubts. In my skillset, in my choice of imagery, in my materials, in the direction of my work, etc. But I think self-doubt can be a good tool if harnessed correctly. It can propel you to strive for improvement, which is what it has done for me.

**KC:** What message are you trying to convey to observers? Does it change per piece/collection, or would you say all of your work follows a general theme?

**JP:** On the whole, my work deals with the notion of home, family, tradition, and culture. It may not be apparent in some works, but there is an underlying thread that connects all of my pieces.

**KC:** Of your many accomplishments and accolades, having a piece in Cheech Marin's collection stands out to me. What was that experience like for you?

**JP:** I am humbled to be in the Cheech Marin Collection, as a number of the artists who are represented have been, and still are, my heroes in the fine arts. To be in such company is a great honor. He and his associate Melissa Richardson Banks have been so kind throughout the years, and I am truly grateful to them. When I began my series of meat paintings based on food associated with my Mexican heritage, I really didn't expect positive feedback. I was just making work that I enjoyed. After I heard of Cheech's similar association with the subject matter, I was thrilled to know he understood its connection – and apparently still does, as he continues to collect my work.

**KC:** You also teach at the university. What has that experience been like during this time of operating remotely?

**JP:** It's been an interesting transition, to say the least, but one that has resulted in fascinating discoveries about the creative process. My colleagues have all come up with remarkable solutions and it's wonderful to see how everyone is approaching this new (for now) normal. No one certainly would have expected or would have wanted this situation, but now we all have these great resources that we have created. It really is very inspiring.

**KC:** In this new landscape of COVID-19 and social-distancing, has your perspective of or approach to creativity changed at all?

**JP:** Interestingly enough, my work prior to our current situation dealt with elements of isolation. If I presented figures in my work, they were usually alone or in very small groups. Now, it seems to be relevant to what we are all going through. More so, this situation has affected how the arts are being viewed.

**KC:** How do you find inspiration and has it changed at all since quarantining?

**JP:** Ideas usually come from various resources. From the more obvious, such as a window / street light or a poorly lit sign, to more obscure references such as a family member or a family argument. The method hasn't changed much. I usually search for inspiration internally. I will say that as I use photographs as distant references, it has certainly added to my imagery.

**KC:** Has your new daily routine affected your creative process itself at all?

**JP:** Yes, it definitely has. Between raising three little boys and my responsibilities to the university and to my students, what little time I did have to create work was drastically interrupted to dedicate time to creating content for my online studio courses. I couldn't have done it without the help of my wife Diana, as well as my family, and I thank them profusely. Regardless, these are first-world problems, and I'm grateful to have a job when so many are left without.

**KC:** What advice would you give to other artists struggling to create during this time period?

**JP:** Find a solution to get back onto your creative output. As difficult as this situation is, there is still no reason not to create work. If anything, it's a great distraction. And besides, who knows where this need for creative solutions might lead you? I had a student who said she ran out of burnt umber (a rich brown color) for her watercolors, and instead used coffee to substitute. It was wonderful to hear! Also, I feel if your content is strong enough, then you should be able to merge it into any medium. Whatever your block may be, find a solution ... even if it's finding coffee to paint with.