



Farmington artist Rosemary Meza-DesPlas, who has been awarded a \$9,100 Fulcrum Fund grant, performs at the Durango Arts Center in 2018. COURTESY PHOTO

SATIRE MIXED WITH ART

Farmington artist gets \$9,100 grant to stage performance piece

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FARMINGTON - For several years, Farmington resident Rosemary Meza-DesPlas has drawn more and more attention for her visual art, which often consists of finely detailed drawings that are crafted by the stitching of human hair and reflects her unflinching perspective on gender and racial issues.

But for the next several months, Meza-DesPlas will be focusing her attention on performance art. She learned last week she had been awarded a \$9,100 Fulcrum Fund grant from Albuquerque-based 516 Arts to produce an original performance art piece, which she is calling "Miss Nalgas USA 2022." She plans to stage it in October.

Meza-DesPlas said she had been thinking about the project for quite some time, but her receipt of the

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grant will allow her to produce it on a much bigger scale than she originally envisioned. She acknowledged that receiving the grant and facing a deadline for producing the show have put her under some pressure, but she welcomes the increased number of options the funding will provide.

"I think it's all going to come together," she said. "It's a great opportunity to really make the production the best that I can. ... This is that opportunity to give it my all."

Meza-DesPlas said she hasn't begun writing the show yet, so she has plenty of work ahead of her between now and the fall. She said she has written poetry and academic papers, but she has never tried her hand at crafting a stage production until now.

"This will be my first time, so it's a great challenge for me as an artist," she said, adding that she believes it is incumbent on her to constantly be growing and expanding creatively. "You can't do that unless you're trying new things. I want to push myself to do new things and get out of my comfort zone."

Meza-DesPlas described "Miss Nalgas USA 2020" as a satirical beauty pageant that compares portrayals of Latinas in mainstream culture to their authentic selves. The show will address issues of identity, ageism and skin color, along with stereotypical notions of beauty.



This gown and sash for Miss Nalgas USA 2022 will be worn by Refried Rosi Frijoles, the main character in Rosemary Meza DesPlas' satirical performance art piece planned for October. COURTESY PHOTO

"I know my project is very feminist based and might seem a little out there. I was not sure how people would take it or feel about it. So it made me feel really good (when the grants were announced). I thought the judges awarding the grants understood what I was trying to do."

Rosemary Meza-DesPlas
Farmington resident and artist

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She said she was inspired to produce the show after reading author Arlene Davila's book "Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People." Davila maintains that Latinos are marketed in a very specific way in mass media, Meza-DesPlas said, going so far as to argue that that kind of marketing has created the idea that there is a "right" way or "wrong" way to depict Latinos.

Meza-DesPlas said she intends to address those kinds of issues through the dialogue in "Miss Nalgas USA 2020." The production is designed to have a serious message, she said, but it will be conveyed in a humorous fashion, as indicated by its title — *nalgas* translates to buttocks in English.

"I know my project is very feminist based and might seem a little out there," Meza-DesPlas said, explaining she initially was concerned about how her grant proposal would be perceived. "I was not sure how people would take it or feel about it. So it made me feel really good (when the grants were announced). I thought the judges awarding the grants understood what I was trying to do."

The \$9,100 cash award will allow Meza-DesPlas to hire and pay a full cast and crew to produce the show, she said. She plans on portraying the main character, Miss Refried Rosi Frijoles, herself, but she will hold a casting call in late summer for the other actors.

She plans on hiring a live band to perform during the show, as well as lighting, sound and video crews. Meza-DesPlas also will be renting a venue for the show — preferably an intimate facility

that allows the audience to have a closer engagement with the show, she said.

"This is an opportunity to pay the talent that's going to work with me," she said.

Meza-DesPlas said she has envisioned the project all along as a Farmington-centric production — one that features a local cast and crew, and engages with the people here.

While she doesn't have a firm date scheduled, Meza DesPlas is hoping to stage the production on Oct. 15 — the last Saturday in Hispanic Heritage Month. She is planning on delivering just a single performance, although she will have the production videotaped and edited so that it has a "second life" beyond that night.

Meza DesPlas did not embrace the idea that she might want to perform the show in other communities if she gets a good response to it. But she didn't flatly reject that notion, either.

"I don't see that as part of this," she said, explaining that she doesn't consider the project "portable" in the sense that she intends for it to have a strong Farmington flavor.


Performing the show elsewhere would require recasting it with actors from those communities, hiring another band and perhaps making other modifications, she said.

"I guess I would want to engage people in that community," she said, adding that tapping into the unique energy of those places would be the goal of such a move.

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