

# Farmington artist sews with hair in expressions of outrage, horror and strength

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“Marching Across Your Lawn, The Grass is on Fire,” Rosemary Meza-DesPlas, 2020, hand-sewn human gray hair on black twill fabric, 32×37 inches. (Courtesy of Rosemary Meza-DesPlas)

Whether it’s natural or dyed, curly or straight, hair can be political, subversive, healthy or ethnic.

It also threads a fine line through issues of ethnicity and gender.

For Rosemary Meza-DesPlas, hair is a tool and a delicate means of expression.

The female experience within a patriarchal society forms the cornerstone of her artwork. She also works in watercolor, installation and performance art.

The Farmington-based artist embroiders her own gray hair onto black twill fabric in expressions of outrage, horror and strength. She is also one of 15 artists awarded a \$50,000 Latinx Fellowship from both the Mellon Foundation and the Ford Foundation in May.

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She is the only New Mexico artist in the group.

“The fellowship recognizes the most compelling Latinx artists working in the U.S. ... and aims to address a systemic lack of support, visibility and patronage of Latinx visual artists,” the press release stated.

Meza-DesPlas had no idea what was going on when she received the news.

“It was a huge surprise to me,” she said in a telephone interview from Farmington. “I cried tears of joy; I was overwhelmed.”



Rosemary Meza-DesPlas working on “Marching Across Your Lawn, The Grass is on Fire” in her studio in Farmington. (Courtesy of Rosemary Meza-DesPlas)

At the time she turned to hair, she was known for her wall drawings.

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“A friend looked at my line work and said from afar it kind of looks like hair,” Meza-DesPlas said. “I did lots of trial and error. I tried to glue it on but it looked sloppy. So I thought of it like sewing.”

The dichotomy of human hair, depending upon context, is it can be engaging or off-putting: long, luxurious hair is sexy, but a hair in one's soup is unappealing.

Meza-DesPlas harvests her own hair.

“I just run my fingers through my hair in the morning,” she said. “I was a brunette; now I’m gray.

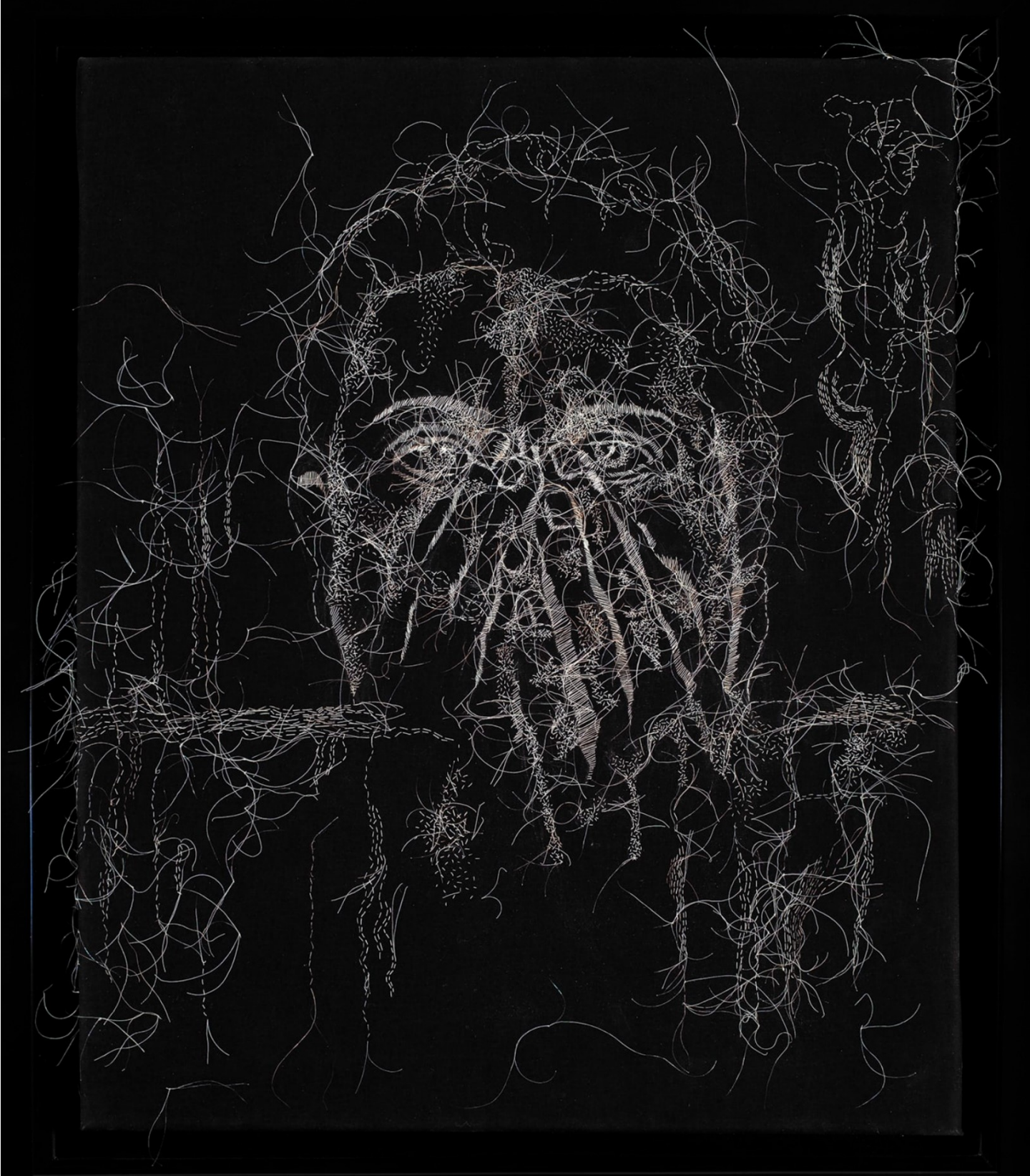
“I like the materiality of hair,” she continued. “It kind of has a relationship to feminism and ethnicity. It speaks to issues of body image and identity.

“Hair is so loaded with meaning,” she added. “Hair can express both the Bible – the story of Samson and Delilah. I like the line work it creates. Mine is naturally curly. It’s very thick and coarse and it’s easy to work with.”

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She begins with a line drawing and fills in the values with her hair. Her latest works conjure themes of feminist outrage.

“What You Whispered, Should Be Screamed” grew from the #MeToo movement. The delicate stitching pictures a screaming woman, her own hair flying back in tendrils of flame. Meza-DesPlas had been reading about a Disney executive who was accused of sexual impropriety.



“Yo tambien,” Rosemary Meza-DesPlas, 2018, hand-sewn human gray hair on black twill fabric, 25×21 inches. (Courtesy of Rosemary Meza-DesPlas)

“The women knew,” Meza-DesPlas said. “They said if you’re going to be in a meeting with him never wear a skirt.

“Really, they should have been screaming about it. They shouldn’t have been whispering. It should have been talked about openly.”

She made “Yo tambien” (“Me Too”) after reading Hillary Rodham Clinton’s 2017 post-election book “What Happened.”

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“I was sketching the faces of the women listening to her concession speech,” Meza-DesPlas said. “They were covering their faces with their hands, but their eyes spoke volumes.”

Similarly, the marching, headless legs of “Marching Across Your Lawn, The Grass is on Fire” speak of anger and determination.

“I did a series about marching as a tool of agency and as a tool of anger to be an agent of change,” she said. “What do you do with your agency and your activism when you get home?”

Born and raised in Garland, Texas, Meza-DesPlas has lived in Farmington since 2016. Both of her parents were from Mexico.

She earned a Master in Fine Arts from Maryland Institute, College of Art (Hoffberger School of Painting) and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of North Texas. Her artwork has been exhibited at numerous galleries and museums throughout the United States, Europe and Asia.

She will hang a new installation, “The Invisible Woman Syndrome,” at Santa Fe’s Form & Concept Gallery, 435 S. Guadalupe St., which began on May 27.