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THE DAILY TIMES



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2022 | DAILY-TIMES.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Farmington artist will debut performance artwork this weekend

Farmington artist Rosemary Meza-DesPlas unveils her

performance artwork

“Miss Nalgas USA 2022” this weekend at the Farmington Civic Center.

PROVIDED PHOTO



Mike Easterling

Farmington Daily Times
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW MEXICO

FARMINGTON — When Farmington artist Rosemary Meza-DesPlas received a \$9,100 grant earlier this year to stage a performance art piece examining the idea of what Latino identity really means, she thought that would give her plenty of cash to work with to realize her vision for

the project.

“It’s funny — you think it seems like a lot of money, but when you start to buy things and create things, it starts to go very quickly,” said Meza-DesPlas, who will raise the curtain on her project, “Miss Nalgas USA 2022” this weekend.

Even though the show is a stage production, Meza-DesPlas emphasizes that it is a performance art piece, not a play. The satirical production centers on a faux beauty competition for self-identifying Latinas who are older than 50.

“Normally, when I perform, it’s just me,” she said. “The difference this time is, I’m working with a group of people, not just me.”

Much of the budget for the show has been devoted to the elaborate costumes that Meza-DesPlas has created, including the one worn by her character, Miss Refried Rosi Frijoles. The headwear worn by the pageant contestants is likely to be a showstopper in itself.

Outrageousness is a key element in many areas of the show, beginning with

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the title, as the Spanish word *nalgas* means buttocks. Meza-DesPlas wrote, directs and stars in the production, while she also put together every other element of the project, making it a demanding project that took her several months to plan and execute.

Still, she said she has enjoyed the experience.

"I have, I really have," she said. "I feel like I've really stretched as an artist and been able to experiment."

The task of designing and creating the costumes was especially challenging, she noted. But she said pushing herself to try new things was an experience that she expects will yield dividends down the line.

"It really made me experiment and think outside the box," she said. "I think it was really a great experience for me as an artist. I see myself picking up some of those skills and putting them back into my process as an artist — but maybe with a new spin."

The cast for the show includes several folks who are well known from other elements of the local creative scene, including Scott Michlin, general manager and morning show host at KSJE-FM; painter and gallery owner Karen Ellsbury; photographer Patrick Hazen; and Cecilia Taulbee-Leaming and Monica Leaming of the band the Zia Chicks, who will perform the music for the production. Also included in the cast are Stephanie Jaquez, Lori Stephens, Doug Gonzalez and Amanda Robles.

Meza-DesPlas recruited the performers personally, explaining that she had a definite idea of what she wanted for each character.

"Each part is very specific," she said.

Michlin will portray the emcee, a character Meza-DesPlas described as an Anglo man pretending to be Latino. Michlin's character will be notable for his fake mustache and poor command of Spanish. Those characteristics are intended to call attention to the tendency of Hollywood producers to regularly cast Anglos in the role of Latinos in their films, she said, citing the example of everyone from Al Pacino in "Scarface" to James Franco playing Fidel Castro in the upcoming movie "Alina of Cuba."

Jaquez, a Farmington High School English instructor, will portray one of the pageant judges in the production. Meza-DesPlas said when she met with her to discover if she would be interested in taking on the role, Jaquez grasped what Meza-DesPlas was trying to do almost instantly.

"As soon as we started talking, I said, 'I kind of see (the judges) as a Greek chorus that propels things forward,'" Meza-DesPlas said. "She said, 'That's funny — I was thinking a Greek chorus myself.'"

Meza-DesPlas said each of the judges is a different personality type, and the judge portrayed by Jaquez is the most critical of the Refried Rosi Frijoles character. Meza-DesPlas said that element is intended to expose the way Latinos often criticize the way other Latinos identify themselves.

Robles' character is the compromiser in the cast, the character most concerned with keeping the peace, while Hazen's character features a strong misogynistic voice.

"His lines follow that line of thought," Meza-DesPlas said. "I couldn't see doing this performance artwork without that line of thought in it, and it seemed

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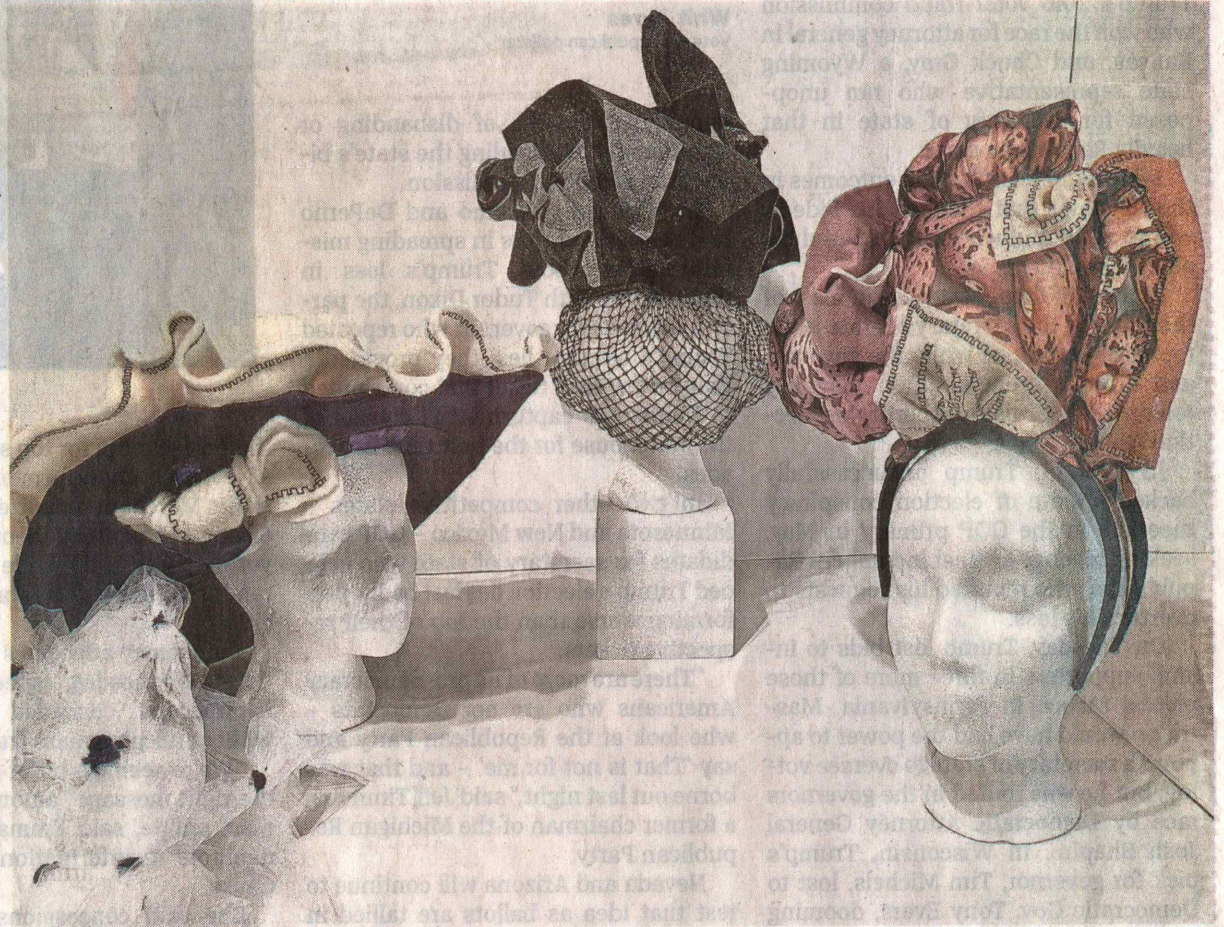


Rosemary Meza-DesPlas' "Miss Nalgas USA 2022" is being funded by a \$9,100 Fulcrum Fund grant.

PROVIDED PHOTO



The emcee's jacket that will be worn by Scott Michlin during the performance artwork "Miss Nalgas USA 2022" this weekend. COURTESY PHOTOS



Rosemary Meza-DesPlas designed and created all the costumes for her performance artwork "Miss Nalgas USA 2022," including the hats.

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wrong to exclude it."

The production's themes were inspired by two books, "Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People" by Arlene Davila and "From Bananas to Buttocks, The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture" by Myra Mendible. Both deal with the way Latinos have been portrayed in popular culture and how the idea of being "authentically" Latino is measured.

Meza-DesPlas originally intended to take the show on the road throughout New Mexico after debuting it

in Farmington. But she said she wound up writing the dialog in a way that featured so many local references, she doesn't believe it would have the same impact in another market.

That doesn't mean "Miss Nalgas USA 2022" will come and go in one night. Meza-DesPlas said the performance will be videotaped and screened at 3 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 3 at the form & concept gallery in the Railyard District in Santa Fe. It also will be shown later at an event in Albany, New York, she said.

Her cast will have only two nights of rehearsal to fine tune its performance, but Meza-DesPlas said she believes that's more than enough time.

"Performance artwork accommodates improvisation," she said. "I know it's doable. I think we can do

two rehearsals and a performance on Saturday without a problem."

Meza DesPlas expressed her gratitude for the Fulcrum Fund grant that is allowing her to stage the show and said she looks forward to unveiling the project.

"It's really a treat to be able to actually see something come to fruition," she said. "It's bigger than I could have done on my own."

"Miss Nalgas USA 2022 will be presented at 7 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 12 at the Farmington Civic Center, 200 W. Arrington St. Admission is free.

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