

SEPTEMBER 8 - OCTOBER 30, 2020

**THIRD COAST DISRUPTED:  
ARTISTS + SCIENTISTS  
ON CLIMATE**

**HECTOR DUARTE**

**DEPS ARTIST PROFILE**

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Glass Curtain Gallery - Columbia College Chicago  
1104 S Wabash Ave, 1st Floor, Chicago, IL 60605  
Gallery Hours: Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
*Capacity of gallery is 10 visitors and masks are required.*

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# THIRD COAST DISRUPTED:

## Artists + Scientists on Climate

*Third Coast Disrupted: Artists + Scientists on Climate* is an exhibition of newly commissioned artworks culminating a yearlong conversation between artists and scientists centered on climate change impacts and solutions in the Chicago region.

Through science-inspired sculpture, painting, collage and more, the artworks examine local impacts -- happening here and now -- ranging from extreme heat to flooding to habitat loss, and beyond. They also shine light on local solutions underway, like "cool roofs," nature-based approaches to slowing stormwater, and backyard habitat restoration. Some imagine future possibilities.

*Third Coast Disrupted* is based on the notion that art can connect and engage with people on an emotional level. It can pique curiosity, be unexpected, tactile, interactive, evocative, and memorable. It can slow people down, inspire them to reflect, move them to talk to each other -- and spur them to act.

**Curatorial Team:** Project Director & Lead Curator, Christine Esposito; Science Curator, Liam Heneghan; Art Curator, Lisa Roberts; Senior Consultant, Meg Duguid

**Participating artists:** Jeremy Bolen, Barbara Cooper, Hector Duarte, Rosemary Holliday Hall, N. Masani Landfair, Meredith Leich, Andrew S. Yang

**Participating scientists:** Elena Grossman, MPH; Daniel Horton, Ph.D.; Abigail Derby Lewis, Ph.D.; Aaron Packman, Ph.D.; Katherine Moore Powell, Ph.D.; Desi Robertson-Thompson, Ph.D.; Philip Willink, Ph.D.

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# HECTOR DUARTE

**Hector Duarte** is a muralist, painter and printmaker. He has worked on more than 50 murals in the Chicago area and in his home country of Mexico. His public art adorns libraries, schools, train stops, the Chicago lakefront, Mexican plazas, and many walls in Chicago neighborhoods and communities throughout the Midwest.

Duarte's artwork is inspired by current and historical human struggle, both collective and personal. He frequently takes on social issues in his art—painting about immigration, borders, identity and culture. Duarte, the son of campesinos, was born in the small rural community of Caurio de Guadalupe, Michoacán. He first studied art through correspondence courses advertised in the back of comic books. He learned mural painting in the studio of David Alfaro Siqueiros in Cuernavaca, studying with teachers who worked directly with the great Mexican muralist.

**Hector Duarte** has called Chicago home since 1985. He has exhibited his paintings and prints in solo and group shows at such venues as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the State of Illinois Gallery, the Chicago Historical Society, the National Museum of Mexican Art, and Casa Estudio Museo Diego Rivera in Mexico City. Duarte has received a number of awards, including artistic production grants from the State of Michoacán, Mexico; a 2008 Illinois Arts Council Fellowship Award; and the 1995 Chicago Bar Association Award for the best work of public art.



*Ice Cream Dream*, 2004, glass tile mosaic, 8.5' x 25.5', Chicago Transit Authority's Western Avenue station, Pink Line. Commissioned by the Chicago Transit Authority.

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*Gulliver in Wonderland*, 2005, acrylic on aluminum siding painted on exterior walls of artist's studio, Cullerton and Wolcott Streets, Chicago.

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*La virgen del maíz y la pinche vieja de Monsanto/ Our Lady of the Corn and the Wicked Witch of Monsanto, 2015, painted print. Photo by Michael Tropea.*





*La ronda parakata*, 2016, sculpture and gathering place located in the Burnham Wildlife Corridor. Created with Alfonso "Piloto" Nieves.

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*Our Lady of Monsanto*, 2015, painting



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# ARTIST INTERVIEW

Conducted by Kaylee Fowler

**Kaylee Fowler:** Can you talk about your process as an artist, how you have engaged in activism throughout your career and how your Pilsen studio reflects this practice?

**Hector Duarte:** I don't necessarily see myself as an activist. I'm a painter and muralist first and foremost. I try to reflect what moves me, and what I think can move others. But art has always played an important role in social movements. And murals in particular are deeply connected with political and social movements, and with the notion of educating or informing the public and the community, and with teaching the people's history, community history.

My murals have dealt with identity, immigration, dreams. I've painted Mexican and community heroes and heroines, Zapata, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Rudy Lozano. All this for me is an artistic endeavor as well as a social endeavor. As a painter who is part of the immigrant community, I am creating works of art both for my fellow immigrants, and also for the broader society in general.

I believe that my studio in Pilsen embodies my philosophy as a public artist. I have a massive mural painted on three sides of the building, dealing with a topic historically vital to my community, immigration. My door is often open, school groups schedule visits, neighborhood people or other artists stop in. People can see works in progress, ask questions. This to me is what it means to be a community artist.

**KF:** As a muralist, do you think this artform has an advantage over traditional gallery and museum-based art now that COVID-19 has pushed audiences to view art in alternative ways?

**HD:** Much of what drives me as a public artist is my belief that all people, rich and poor should have access to art, without requiring a museum admission or leaving your neighborhood. Art should be everywhere, and it should be free. To me, COVID-19 has only reaffirmed my belief in the necessity of art for all--freely accessible on our community walls.

During and after the George Floyd protests, I also think we saw what a

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# ARTIST INTERVIEW

## Continued

natural, spontaneous human expression mural painting is. In a matter of just days, dozens of informal murals were painted all over the city, often on plywood used to board up businesses.

**KF:** What do you think galleries can learn from the mural arts movement about art that engages with the public?

**HD:** Galleries are unable to commercialize public art. There is no way to sell it or for someone to “own” it. I think that’s one reason galleries have rarely taken public art seriously. Murals are seen as pseudo art, minority art, naïve art, street art. With a few token exceptions (Basquiat, Keith Haring), the artform--and its artists--tend not to be respected the way fine art is.

University, museum, and public galleries can play an important role in highlighting mural art and other public art and recognizing both its artistic and social value. The first exhibit at what’s now the National Museum of Mexican Art, for instance, was called The Barrio Murals and paid homage to Pilsen walls. Chicago’s Cultural Center has highlighted the city’s murals and muralists.

**KF:** How much creative freedom do you have in mural work as opposed to other mediums? Given that they must be made in a static, public location, and on a wall or structure likely already owned by someone other than the artist, do you ever face any pushback towards your idea for a piece?

**HD:** I don’t feel less creative freedom working on murals than I do working on my studio art. In part, this is because I am careful about the jobs I accept and the theme the commissioning entity is looking for. For instance, I have turned down mural jobs on beautiful walls because the owner wanted a brand logo somewhere on the mural. I turned down a mural at a school because the administration wanted a picture of a veteran, the school’s namesake. I was not interested in painting anything I felt could glorify the military.

As a public artist, I do accept a commitment to community, and to the fact that my work will be viewed in public. I see this as something to take into account, but not as a hindrance to creative freedom, any more than the dimensions of a canvas are a limitation on the creative freedom of an easel painter. Constraints can encourage creativity. And indeed, working with

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# ARTIST INTERVIEW

## Continued

and talking to community is part of my research and planning phase, and has simply become a natural part of my artistic process.

Because I'm painting in public, I do sometimes get pushback or comments, especially early on when I'm first adding color to the wall or drawing composition lines-- and before the final work really takes shape. But I also get so many additional ideas and positive feedback from people passing by.

I also never see walls as static. One of the most fundamentally creative aspects of mural painting is adapting the mural to the unique architecture and site where I'm painting. So no two walls are the same even if the dimensions are similar because the surrounding architecture, rooflines, street corners are always different. I also take into account the perspective of viewers as they move along the wall from one point to another, hiding elements in the work that can be viewed distinctly from different points of view. And I'm always looking to "expand" the wall by extending elements from the main mural around corners, into the sidewalk, onto the ceiling, or down the block.

**KF:** While the majority of your work is painting and print-based, for this exhibition you are working on a sculpture; what techniques and style have you found that translate well from two dimensional to sculpture work?

**HD:** Actually, in my two-dimensional work, especially large murals, I am constantly looking for ways to represent three dimensions. I love *trompe l'oeil* and frequently try to depict the wall or building I'm painting onto the wall itself. I often play with perspective in a way that allows the viewer to see an object as either flat or three dimensional, depending on their perspective. I've used mirrors, lights, or water to enhance two-dimensional murals. A good example of this is *Quetzalcoatl Returns to Look at Himself in the Mirror*, a mural on the Canal Walk in Indianapolis that can be viewed in the canal itself, as a reflection.

In the art installation for *Third Coast Disrupted*, I've tried to use material that connects to the themes I'm dealing with. For me, the monarch butterfly has artistically always been tied to the experience of human migration and the immigrant experience, so I built the sculpture from wire, which I use in my

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# ARTIST INTERVIEW

## Continued

paintings to represent the border and policies that keep people caged or separated.

**KF:** How did you learn about Raúl Hernández and Homero Gómez, and why did you decide to make them the subject of this work for *Third Coast Disrupted*?

**HD:** I learned about them through the news. Honestly, they went about their labor quietly and intently. I was moved to make them the subject of my artwork because I believe people should know that these two men doing such noble work, quietly standing up to powerful logging and organized crime interests, were sacrificed in this way. I also wanted others to understand the need to protect the habitat of the monarch, which Raúl Hernández and Homero Gómez died for. Protecting monarch habitats can be done from here in the north as well.

**KF:** While those of us in the US still have to find alternative ways to engage with art and activism due to the pandemic, what sort of active engagement with climate change do you hope viewers will be able to take away from this exhibit while we are still socially distancing?

**HD:** The importance of the *Third Coast Disrupted* initiative is the way it connects artists and scientists, which hopefully can lead to greater consciousness in artists and promote and call works of art that call attention to climate change and be another vehicle for public awareness and change.

My hope is that my work for *Third Coast Disrupted*, *Requiem for Two Spirits*, *Defenders of the Migrant Tümü*, will create a consciousness around some concrete steps each of us can take to help preserve butterfly habitats. We need to use our public and private green space—parks, yards, even small strips of green space between sidewalk and street—to help butterflies (and other creatures too, like bees). We can all create monarch waystations in our yards and parks. Hopefully this act of caring for and then planting milkweed is one small but concrete way people can address broader issues around the decline of the monarch population.

As a painter, I have used the symbol of the butterfly, which travels between Mexico and the U.S./Canada as a symbol for human migration. It's my hope that caring for the monarch habitat also helps people meditate on



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# ARTIST INTERVIEW

Continued

human migration, on freedom of movement (who enjoys that freedom, and who doesn't), and on borders.



*La Ronda Parkata*, 2016. A gathering within the sculpture

# DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series, presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community.

The DEPS Artist Profile Series is managed by Fine Arts major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Kaylee Fowler. Design, animation and illustration by Graphic Design major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Gianella Goan.

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Learn more at <https://students/colum.edu/deps> and [www.ThirdCoastDisrupted.org](http://www.ThirdCoastDisrupted.org).

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