

On Exhibit: Unseen labor cleverly highlighted in UAlbany works

By Indiana Nash | [January 26, 2022](#)



Exhibition shot of “Ronny Quevedo: offside” on view at the University Art Museum at UAlbany. (Indiana Nash)

“Ronny Quevedo: offside,” one of the latest exhibits to open at the University Art Museum, is deceptively sparse on first blush.

The gallery walls aren’t densely packed with works; yet, every inch of the space is thoughtfully used and considered through site-specific installations and works on paper.

In the largest installation, titled “fuera de lugar,” vinyl red and blue lines form a diagram from floor to ceiling on two of the gallery’s arched walls. The title translates to “out of place” and is a reference to a rule in soccer that restricts a player’s movement. The stark lines are reminiscent of a gymnasium, though certain breaks in the lines reference a sewing pattern.

These themes are echoed throughout the exhibit and are inspired by Quevedo’s mother and father, who immigrated to New York from Ecuador. He’s also inspired by their careers; his mother worked as a seamstress and his father played professional soccer.

Quevedo weaves those two pieces of his family's identity together, especially in works like "Ode to Liga Deportiva Guayaquil de Indoor Futbol (Working Class Epistemology)." Thin wooden planks are lined up on a large panel and topped with flecks of red, white, orange and yellow, creating a frantic pattern. Dress patterns peek out from gaps between the planks.

In another piece, "el back-centro," the references are layered together more ambiguously. Dress patterns mounted on muslin are depicted in gold leaf and placed so that their lines create a shape reminiscent of a field. Black thread sewn on top is a possible reference to certain field lines.

Elsewhere in the exhibit, Quevedo considers cultural structures and traditions in 'a mother's hand,' an installation that features a pyramid shape made of stacked plywood boxes. The shape references platform architecture and agricultural terracing of the Andes, as well as stadium bleachers. It also pays homage to pre-Columbian textile work.

The piece is on the first floor of the gallery and helps to ground the entire exhibit within the gallery space. Quevedo also placed works on carbon paper on each of the gallery's four walls, denoting the four cardinal directions. These help to orient the viewer, even as installations like "fuera de lugar" disorient and raise questions about belonging and finding one's place in the world.

Quevedo's work pulls together the personal and the political and pairs well with video installations by Rodrigo Valenzuela, also on view at the museum.

The multidisciplinary artist is a former day laborer and his work highlights overlooked or unseen labor.

In one video, a man is seen drawing a diagram of a stadium on a chalkboard. Alongside that, a group of workers pick up trash and clean a stadium presumably after a sporting event. Overlaid on top of these videos is a narrative spoken by two people, each talking about the importance of working hard, of discipline, etc. The voices belong to Bear Bryant (1913-1983), 25-year head coach of the University of Alabama's football team, and Ray Lewis, National Football League player and two-time Super Bowl champion.

Between Bryant and Lewis' narrations, a member of the cleaning crew tells viewers about his journey of migrating to the United States, how he isn't ashamed of his work and how he just wants to work hard.

It's easy to assume at first that the man seen drawing the diagram is planning out football plays, yet as the minutes tick by, it's clear to see that he's drawing plans for the stadium's cleaning crew.

The comparison between the cleaners and the players validates the work that the cleaning crews do while also raising questions about how that labor is viewed and why it's viewed that way.

Nextdoor to Valenzuela's "Video Works" is "Fruit Soup," another new exhibit that's well worth a visit. This one is in the Collections Study Gallery, a space that was once an office and was transformed into a gallery during the pandemic.

"Fruit Soup" features a dozen photographs by photorealist painter Audrey Flack and 3D printed sculptures by Gracelee Lawrence. The sculptures are funky fruit shapes all done in stunning colors. At the exhibit's center, half a dozen sculptures, including a purple strawberry and a yellow/red pear, spin on small metal platforms, catching the light from above.

Flack's photographs have recurring themes of life and death, luxury and consumption, often featuring mirrored or glass elements along with everyday objects, creating densely packed compositions that beg one to their time with each.

Each of the exhibits at UAlbany's museum will be on view through April 2. There will be an artist talk with Quevedo and Valenzuela from 4:30-5:30 p.m. Thursday, Mar. 3 and an artists' reception that evening from 5:30-7. The gallery is open from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Tuesday – Saturday.