

## ARTS

### "Gently Fried"

Local curatorial powerhouse Los Outsiders creates a poignant three-part exhibition (or is it five?)

REVIEWED BY SETH ORION SCHWAIGER, FRI., JUNE 5, 2015



*My Little Pony* by Claire Ashley, from a 2013 performance

Before the opening, artist Jimmy James Canales walked the entire 70-plus miles from San Antonio to Austin, snapping pictures along the way. Following the general north by northeast geographical pattern of that journey, he laid out his photos on the gallery wall of the Mexican American Cultural Center. Toward Austin and the ceiling, familiar faces begin to make an appearance. One of the first is local artist and curator

Michael Anthony Garcia, who joined Canales for the last mile before hosting the artist and his partner at his own house for a number of days. The trek is not only representative of Canales' wider practice of re-pioneering the forgotten spaces between destinations, but also representative of the curatorial approach of local collective Los Outsiders (Garcia, Jaime Salvador Castillo, Robert Jackson Harrington, and Hector Hernandez) – an approach that runs counter to the top-down, near-anthropological approach cleanly separating artist from curator, instead replacing that historical tack with one that is actively involved and clearly engaged with the artistic process itself. That approach is but one contributing factor to the success of Los Outsiders' ambitious group exhibition, "Gently Fried." An even more important factor (which also finds direct parallels in Canales' slo-mo ultramarathon) is endurance.

Los Outsiders says "Gently Fried" is an exhibition in three parts: a program of performance work, an exhibition, and a symposium – but really, "Gently Fried" is an exhibition in five parts. Two of the most interesting arts events of the season were fundraisers to help mitigate the intimidating cost of the other three events, but due to their creativity, outside participation, and solid delivery, it's hard not to think of them as equally important aspects of the series. The first was *Dance Your Pants Off*, a ridiculous dance battle between representatives from several Austin arts institutions. In pursuit of victory and the Golden Chancla, there were many bribes, bloody feet, and very tight clothing. The second was *ATXLoteria*, an event and a set of Loteria cards designed by Harrington. A veritable who's who of Austin arts insiders, the decks trade out the archetypes of the traditional Mexican game, replacing them instead with surprisingly accurate illustrations of nearly all the major arts personalities in the city, portrayed with a good dose of impish humor.

Those two fundraisers made it possible for the official three acts of "Gently Fried" to take place, each centered on themes of "change, relationships, house/home, and community." More specifically, the performances, exhibition, and symposium tackle the changes caused by the rapid growth of Austin and how the city's creative community grapples with and affects those changes. Claire Ashley's *My Little Pony* is a work that sums up those changes, at least in terms of aesthetic flavor. The giant, lumpy, inflated, barely anthropomorphic sculpture first served as a performative prop in Act 1 before being parked in a corner of the exhibition space, where it easily stretches up to the ceiling. Brought to life by twelve performers, the lumbering balloonlike form was clumsy, aimless, and, in rare moments, surprisingly graceful.

This and other works bring up tough topics through humor and do so without appearing overly preachy. Regardless of whether or not the viewer had a chance to participate in the symposium, a question raised at that event lingers in the mind after leaving the exhibition: "How do we attach a conscience to growth?"

At least for those of us in the contemporary arts community, having an insightful friend to walk the last mile with us is roughly ten thousand steps in the right direction.

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## Los Outsiders: Gently Fried

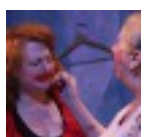
Mexican American Cultural Center, Sam Z. Coronado Gallery, 600 River

[www.losoutsiders.org](http://www.losoutsiders.org)

Through June 13

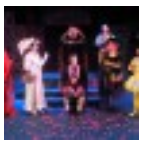
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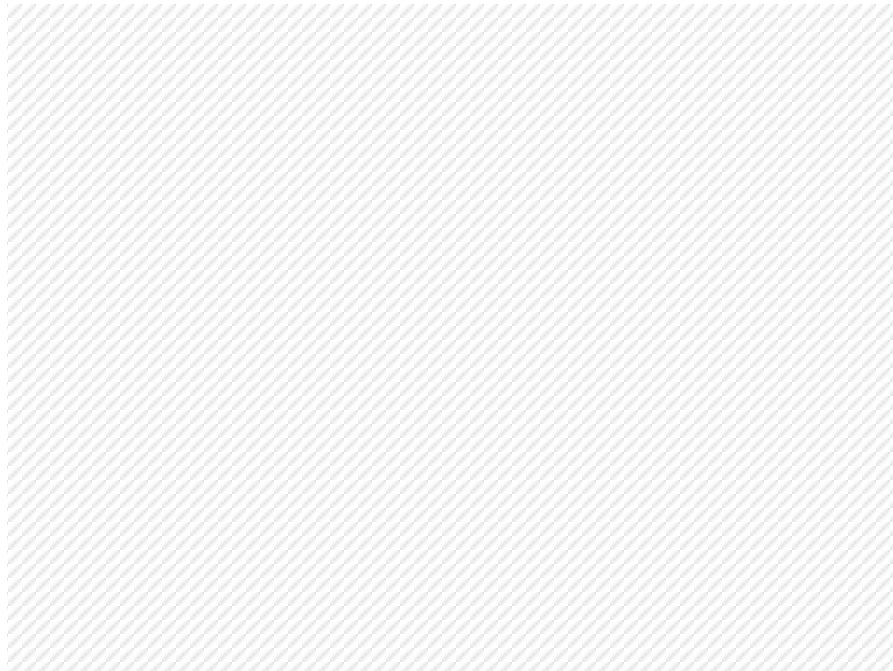
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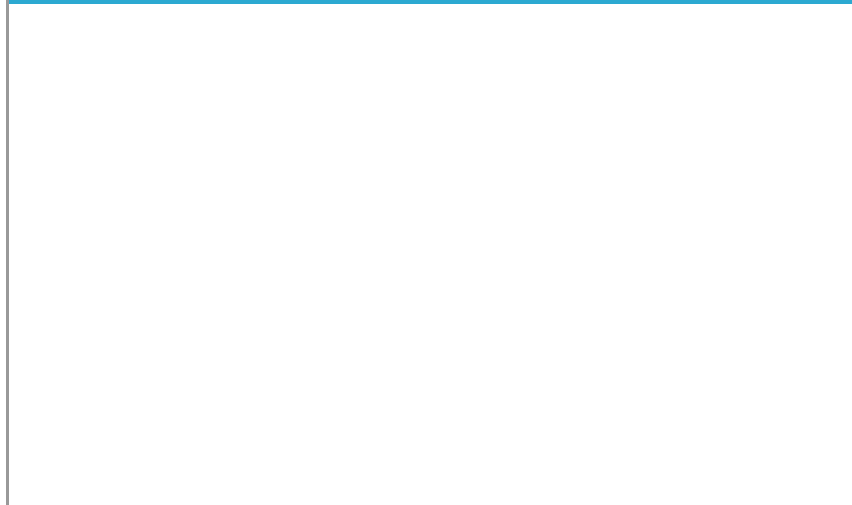
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