

# Latinx Photography in the United States

## A VISUAL HISTORY

Elizabeth Ferrer

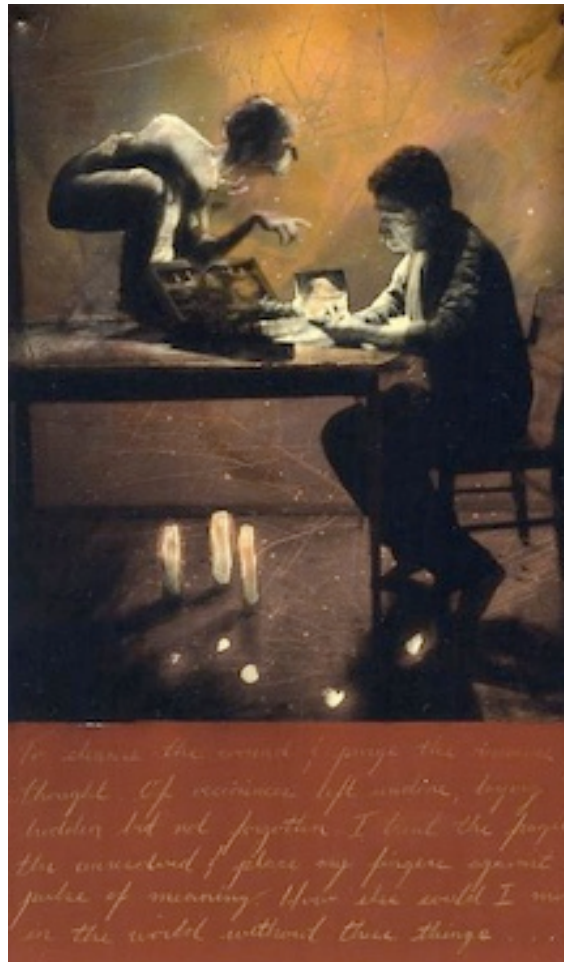
### CHAPTER FIVE

## Staging Self, Narrating Culture

Explorations of spirituality and mortality also preoccupied Don Gregorio Antón (b. 1956, Los Angeles, California: based in San Miguel de Allende Guanajuato, Mexico). Over the course of decades, Antón pursued idiosyncratic technical modes with the aim of visualizing the unseeable, motivated by his his own lifelong spiritual quest, by visions he has experienced, and by stories told to him by elders in his family.

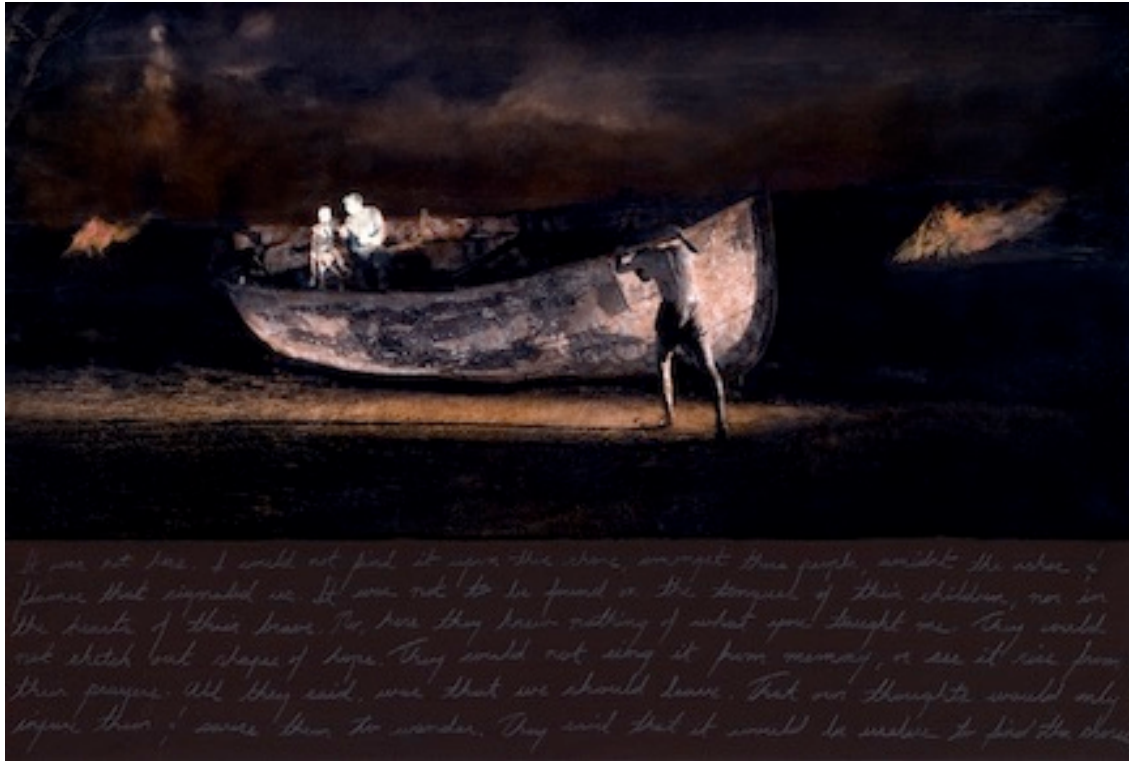
Early in his career, in the late 1970s, he photographed nude figures, composing with light and shadows and obscuring elements to produce intimate scenes with a heightened sense of mystery. In the early 1990s Antón began to move toward his mature style, which reveals the influence of his grandmother, a *curandera* (healer). In one series he depicted supine human bodies, some illuminated by intimations of fire and evoking a return to a primal, mystical experience of life. His images of this era conjure dream states and the realm of myth. grandmother, a *curandera* (healer).

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In the first decade of the twenty-first century Antón began his *Retablos* series, inspired by his childhood experiences as an altar boy. He was moved by Catholic ritual and its teachings of hope and faith, but the church was also the place where he would see remarkable visions of the Virgen Mary and other saints coming to life. The photographs in the series, dramatic staged narratives accompanied by handwritten texts, draw from the Mexican popular tradition of *retablos*. small devotional scenes typically painted on tin to offer thanks to the Virgen Mary or other saints for healing or answered prayers. Often photographing himself

in these scenes along with others, Antón created enigmatic otherworldly visions, as if conjuring arcane revelations or alternate realities. In one work he depicts a scene glowing with a mysterious light of a man seated at a table who the series, dramatic staged narratives accompanied by handwritten texts, draw from the Mexican popular tradition of *retablos*. small devotional scenes typically painted on tin to offer thanks to the Virgen Mary or other saints for healing or answered prayers. Often photographing himself in these scenes along with others, Antón created enigmatic otherworldly visions, as if conjuring arcane revelations or alternate realities. In one work he depicts a scene glowing with a mysterious light, of a man seated at a table who appears to receive knowledge from a half-earthly being. In another, from 2007, two figures-a man and a skeleton-are seated in a large wooden boat being pushed out to sea by another figure. Shrouded in darkness they seem about to embark to points unknown, unfettered by earthly concerns.



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Antón printed these images on translucent membranes adhered to copper plates that he flame-treated, etched, sanded, and then hand-painted. With pencil, he inscribed prayerful texts, or “lessons” as he called them, to the works’ surfaces, underscoring the revelatory nature of his artistic practice. In one series, he framed small photographs and personal relics sealed in wax within elaborate gold monstrances, the kind used in Catholic masses and processions to display the communion host or holy relics. In these ways, he conflates his own Catholic upbringing with a mystical form of spirituality.



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photography to its essential form, as a medium that illuminates or inscribes with light.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Geographies

In contrast, Don Gregorio Antón, who has long sought to give form to the spiritual and the metaphysical, has devoted his recent work to the border, a sphere that for him is so haunting that he can only compare it metaphorically. His series of constructed images printed on aluminum, *What I Forgot to Forget*, portrays not the specificities of a place but the inhumanity wrought by geopolitical power. The images, some monstrous beings and others meditative by nature, are inspired by a story of the young Antón heard from his grandfather, of seeing a child lost to the currents of the Rio Grande during a storm so heavy that its body seemed to be covered in white shrouds. In *The Crossing* 2018, Antón evokes the border as a kind of no-place where the act of crossing slips from life to death, flesh to dissipation.

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