

Ana-Teresa Fernández

SF GATE

Mexican artist pays tribute to lost students

Kimberly Chun

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Ana Teresa Fernández's 2016 oil on canvas "Erasure 1 (performance documentation)" is on display in "Ana Teresa Fernández: Erasure" through April 16 at Gallery Wendi Norris. Courtesy Gallery Wendi Norris

Ana Teresa Fernández recalls the moment she first learned of the 2014 disappearance of 43 students from an Ayotzinapa, Mexico, teachers college.

“I remember being seated in my kitchen table when I first read the news of the students’ disappearance in Mexico, and feeling a tremendous pang in my stomach,” says the native of Tampico, Mexico, who earned her bachelor and master of fine arts at San Francisco Art Institute and lives in San Francisco.

In the subsequent months, she continued to read about their violent fate and the subsequent outcry with many protesters wearing black. Now Fernández pays tribute to those students in “Erasure,” her exhibition at Gallery Wendi Norris, which includes a video, also titled “Erasure,” capturing her performance of painting herself almost entirely black and hyperrealistic paintings of various body parts swathed in black.

“These students’ lives had had no value to the government — they were rural poor adolescents,” Fernández says. “I wanted to give them value, illuminate their situation. I wanted to see what it would look and feel like to erase my own identity in mourning but also in homage to these 43 students.”

The almost-all-black paintings were particularly challenging. The first one took almost eight months to finish as she concocted 15 color combinations to get the right luscious, velvety black. Still, her process is always a “marathon,” Fernández says.

“It is important to sustain that initial feeling of *why* you are doing the work throughout those two years,” she adds, “because it is that passion/frustration/pain/beauty/anger that will translate to the viewer.”

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Ana Teresa Fernández: Erasure: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Through April 16. Gallery Wendi Norris, 161 Jessie St., S.F. (415) 346-7812. <http://gallerywendinorris.com>.

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CLARK
GALLERY**

248 Utah Street
SF, CA 94103
+ 415 399 1439
cclarkgallery.com

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