

VOGUE

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When you think of the late Tejano singer Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, maybe it's her risqué onstage costumes that first spring to mind, or even flashes of Jennifer Lopez's portrayal of the pop star in the 1997 biopic *Selena*. While Selena's penchant for sequined bras and bedazzled jackets earned her the unofficial (and somewhat reductive) moniker of the "Tejano Madonna," textile artist Travis Boyer's new exhibition "*Ahora y Nunca*" (showing until July 9 at the Bushwick gallery Signal) emphasizes a critically undervalued aspect of Selena's legacy: As the head of Selena Etc., a small South Texas chain of boutiques and salons that housed her personal clothing line, Selena was a bona fide entrepreneur. Sewn within the seams of Selena Etc.'s business-like dresses and glossy suits was an aspiration of the late '90s, a dream that she hoped would cross borders, cultures, and socioeconomic divides.

Texas-born Boyer had been a Selena fan since he was a kid (she died when he was just 16), but as an adult artist his collection of Selena-brand clothing, catalogs, and memorabilia rapidly expanded over the months he spent in Norway for an artist's residency. Feeling disconnected from his roots, Boyer went deeper into the cult of Selena fandom. He found himself staying up late browsing Selena-branded items on eBay and Instagram. For the exhibition, he's neatly displayed his substantial collection in clear plastic bins in the gallery's back room, evoking the feeling of an artfully formalized storage unit.



Travis Boyer, Install shot of *Ahora y Nunca* Photo: Timothy Doyan / Courtesy of SIGNAL Gallery

This vast archive of Selena material served as inspiration for the original paintings and sculptures of "*Ahora y Nunca*," which translates to "now and never." The objects Boyer created stem from his vision of an alternate historical timeline beginning just before Selena's death in 1995, after which her clothing line and boutiques began to taper off. Boyer imagines a world in which Selena's brand lives on, citing Jessica Simpson's career trajectory from pop star to commercial shoe ambassador as a path that Selena might

have naturally followed. Boyer collaborated with the Oaxacan Biidaüü Weaving Collective to create a set of luxurious hand-woven equestrian blankets that each depict one of Selena's signature stage outfits.

As a brand, Selena Etc. seemed to anticipate a more unified North America through mature business-casual designs: As Boyer describes the four dresses from Selena Etc.'s 1996 collection that he's displayed on dress forms loaned from the Met Costume Institute, he's quick to connect the fashions to larger political and cultural forces at play at that time. Ann Richards, then the governor of Texas, had assembled the most gender and ethnically diverse cabinet in the state's history. The build up to NAFTA, meanwhile, led some to believe that the United States and Mexico would soon enjoy open commerce and borders along the same lines as countries in the European Union. As Boyer describes it, the general sense was that there would be "a NAFTA dollar . . . [and] that all of this commerce, entrepreneurship, and collaboration" between Mexico and the United States was going to take place.



Selena Etc. Inc. offewear from circa 1996 Photo: Timothy Doyan / Courtesy of SIGNAL Gallery

Selena's stately silhouettes, prim gold buttons, and satiny suits (which Boyer believes were inspired by the outfits that Cybill Shepherd's chic lady PI character wore in *Moonlighting*, Selena's favorite TV show) give the impression of a "professional, self-determined woman uniform." In choosing to sell this image as opposed to the steamier one she embodied on stage, Boyer believes that Selena was attempting to meet the needs of the borderless professional working women, Tejana entrepreneurs like herself.

Boyer describes himself as a "feelings hoarder" and his collection of Selena Etc. clothing and memorabilia is not motivated so much by any sense of nostalgia or sentimentality. Rather, he's interested in sharing "evidence of a different American reality that was very inspiring to me," one that we could still inhabit if we tapped the transformative potential of objects and clothing. Clothing, according to Boyer, has "this kind of beautiful, transferable ambition, and in some ways when you put on something, you become that thing." Walking through "Ahora y Nunca," it seems that all we need to do is pull our Selena Etc. suits out from storage, steam out the wrinkles, and prepare to do the work necessary to yet again achieve that dream of cross-cultural unity. It was, as Boyer describes, "temporarily foreclosed upon for a number of reasons, including her death, including these unfortunate political reasons, but it's still there. It's still a possibility."