



Poetry Collection by **LUPE MENDEZ**

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Originally from Galveston, Texas, **Lupe Mendez** (Poet//Writer//Educator//Activist) works with Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say, Brazilian Arts Foundation and other organizations to promote poetry events, advocate for literacy/literature and organize creative writing workshops that are open to the public. He is the founder of Tintero Projects and works with



emerging Latinx writers and other writers of color within the Texas Gulf Coast Region. Lupe co-hosts INKWELL, a collaborative podcast on regional, national and international Latinx writers and other writers of color. Mendez is a CantoMundo Fellow, a Macondo Fellow and an Emerging Poet Incubator Fellow.

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Mendez has close to 20 years of experience as a performance poet, having opened up for such notable writers as Dagoberto Gilb, Esmeralda Santiago and the late Raul Salinas. He has shared his poetry across the country in places such as the Holocaust Museum Houston, the Jung Center, MECA (Houston), the Mission Cultural Center For Latino Arts (San Francisco), the National Hispanic Cultural Center (Albuquerque) and the Mexican American Cultural Center (Austin). A keynote speaker/poetry performer across Texas, Mendez hosts writing workshops across the country, most recently as a teaching artist for the Poetry Foundation's Teacher Poetry Summits.

Mendez is an internationally published writer with prose work in *Latino Rebels*, *Houston Free Press*, *the Kenyon Review* and Norton's *Sudden Fiction Latino: Short-Short Stories From The United States and Latin America*, *Flash* (University of Chester, England), and poetry in *The Bayou Review* (University of Houston-Downtown), *Huizache*, *Luna Luna Magazine*, *Pilgrimage*, *Texas Review*, *Bordersenses*, *HeART Journal Online*, *Glass Poetry Journal*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Valuable* and *Gulf Coast Journal*, among others.

Mendez has been honored as one of Houston Press' "Creative 100s" and was also awarded a Downs Intellectual Freedom Award for the defense of Mexican American Studies and literature across the Southwest United States. Mendez's work reflects his roots in Texas and the Mexican state of Jalisco. Mendez is the son of an undocumented Mexican and a Southern Tejana and his work remarks on issues from the political to the emotional in a way that intends to connect with both the novice reader to the poetic writer.



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Photograph of “Woman in Red Dress, Sunflowers, Sitting with Blanket”

Óigame, doña, ¿y esos mirasoles? ¿a cuanto los vende? Ándele, véndeme las ¿no? Y la cobija también, que las líneas en negro y blanco remind me of a tent entrance to a circus at the edge of a field, a field in Tlajomulco, so straight, so propped up, parece capa, eres majestad con esa capa, at the edge of you y los mirasoles, they grow out of you right now, you grow out of the wall, you grow into the sky, your trenzas are long, stem stocks tied in bright yellow orange, you grow into the clouds, the white ones that sit next to you, your hair Doña, enrollado en rayos de sol, amarillo profundo, véndeme su pelo, los rayos, ándele, doña, no sea mala, véndeme las ¿no? No, no sus ojos, ni su respiro, pero las flores, I am sorry, I should have complemented you on your purple, tu rosada, tu morada, your pink vestido, lleno de lunares, la cobija lleno de rayas en los rayos del sol, el sol, el sol que la cubre en un fulgor, que la cubre, que el sol extiende su boca y bese su piel, un beso en su frente, que brille, que brille, que brille. Perdón, doña, véndeme su tiempo, su silencio, su espacio en la pared, sus pies que no puedo ver, su manos que son mirasoles, hecho de nubes, hecho de rostro, hecho de paz, de paz, de paz, mejor, la dejo doña, la dejo, la dejo, solita, mirasol, en paz.

The Boys at the Tennis Courts

drink malt liquor and sit on park
tables. They crack a cold idea that
susses out the sides of their mouths –

*Wait until the lights go out, homie,
 climb that shit up the chain link.*
*Wait with empty bottles, guey,
 aim them at the tennis courts.*

The park, the courts, full of young
gente blasting cumbias, playing on
columpios, full of ladies and lords.

No one's ever played tennis there,
meditation room for quarreling lovers,
where ritual dance is arranged

for a quince, chalk X's y la señora
Anita who tells you where you need
to stand.

No one pans back to the three of them.
Bottles empty. No one notices them
sitting beneath an oak tree, a 7:30 pm

shade, the hustle of Wednesday evening,
the lights over the courts. They come
out of hiding, feel their way up the chain

link. A slow climb, a bottle or two,
stuffed in oversized khaki Dickies.
A slip of the foot, a pause to see

if anyone else notices. They move
up, easy. The park lights haven't turned
off yet. It's not 8:00 pm. They wait,

each straddle on the fence,
the oak branches hide them in leaves,
a sudden fear of falling and a whisper—

fuck it.

What My Father Really Means

I

Si trabajas dos jales y andas de prisa—nomas échate agua caliente en el pelo, los sobacos y enjuaga tu perico y caracoles.

[The days will grow into each other, the work hours addict you, the mind falls asleep in upright double shifts, there is nothing wrong with work, with washing your dick in the sink, means you can't miss a minute making money; clean yourself, wipe away the tired in hot rags, then go back to hustle y trabájale]

II

Al manejar un carro—tu nomas písale mijo, el que se pone encima, atropella el hijo de su chingada madre. [You will hear these words said to you: mojado, spic, pocho, americano, wetback, beaner, marijuano, brownie, darkie, alien, illegal, boy, dirty mexican, greaser, roach, rat, flea, anchor baby. Ignore the air they float on. Tilt your head toward the yellow of the sun, darker. Grow warmer. Build laugh. Dig, dance, move into the space between these words, these voices, so the only sound heard is a gruñido in their stomachs.]

III

No busques bronca, pero si aparece, mételes un putazo.

[I will be the one to teach you how to fight. You will need to defend yourself from people who disrespect you. I'll pelt fists against your frame. This will be the first memory I place in you: you will drop a miller high life from my hands and I will hit your temple, watch you roll down a flight of wooden stairs. You will know the taste of varnished wood lodged in your gums. Smile. We will do this often. Come here and let's begin.]

IV

Meate la mano si te cortas bien mal, luego échate tierra, al rato, tendrás callos bien hechos.

[Take care of your hands. You will wash windows and plates and avoid glass in streets. You will remember playing a las escondidas at night, the slice from broken glass as you fall, your hand slick red, palm up—remember the feel of a hot stream from you to wash away a trickle of blood. You will feel the same sting the day you first clean windows. You will have just popped blisters on your palms, submerge your hands into a pail to reach for rags, rush back to that night, piss coating your hand, the sting, the strong smell of ammonia will never leave your nostrils. But your skin will be thicker and those windows will glisten, not a crack among them.]

V

Si se te para ese chilio en los pantalones, guárdalo para tu novia.

[You will find a young girl your age, care for her, you will laugh as you grope and flash body parts, you will flush in the face, blow blood vessels on beach nights, the smell of coconut scented sunblock coating your girl, and you will not have to go to her, with money in your hand, to a room above a bar, a nervous wreck, an exchange of service, an empty physical drive, to fuck with barely a word spoken, the sound of a radiola below her bed, the light scent of sweat and her skin cold, you will never have to know el barrio rojo mijo, because you will know how to talk to women in ways I didn't know they should have been spoken to.]