

Living *Without a Name, Without a Body*, Saakred Opens Up About Their Transition  
By Sloan Wyatt

AUSTIN, TX -- Transitioning can be a vulnerable process. “It’s all about being in the in-between,” said Saakred, a contemporary, transgender artist from San Antonio who prefers to go by their artist name. “How do you find yourself if you’re constantly in this state of fluid?”

Covering the walls of the Center Space Gallery, Saakred’s new art exhibit, “Sin Nombre, Sin Cuerpo,” sought to convey the experience of transitioning through a multimedia exhibit displayed at the Visual Arts Center from Sept. 20 until Oct. 18.

In the span of two rooms, Saakred guided the audience through a timeline of their transition, documenting the medical aspects as well as the personal toils. The title -- Without a Name, Without a Body -- embodied the time and money invested into becoming their true self.

Trans Act I, the first half of the exhibit, depicted Saakred’s transition through a series of forms, bills and letters scattered across a white wall. For each document, the artist cut out their legal name, often choosing to write “Saakred” in the margins instead. Here, they sought to convey the ambiguity of their name throughout their transition.

While transitioning, Saakred changed their name from a female name to a male name.

Unfortunately, legal documents stood in the way of Saakred being able to identify legitimately with this name for months. Saakred did not want to comment on the details regarding their

process but did say that “it is a lengthy and complicated bureaucratic process (as well as) a personal journey for each person, each on their own timeline. ”

Parallel to the wall was a projection of Saakred as a woman cutting their braids off, symbolizing them making the transition from woman to man. Trans Act I was pulled together by a glass sealed case at the center of the room that contained neat rows of testosterone injection packaging on one side with empty bottles laid out alongside them.

For Saakred, telling the story of their transition not only meant describing the medication and paperwork, it demanded a deeper understanding of their history and heritage. Thus, the artist revealed the inner workings of their mind through Trans Act II, an exploration of “masculinity, machismo and familiarity in a new body.”

Themes of gender and sexuality intersected as Saakred presented how their Latin culture had influenced these concepts. Childhood sketches of ancient Aztec warriors and fallen princesses provided context for the Latino artist’s early notions of “machismo” or masculine pride.

These images were juxtaposed with three lavishly decorated car hoods, two portraying provocative Chicana women. The depictions on the car hoods explored the themes of masculinity and femininity through the lens of lowrider culture, an aspect of Mexican-American culture originating from Los Angeles in the 1950s.

Directly next to the car hoods were three television screens, two showing a recording of Saakred removing their surgical bandages post-operation and the middle one of raw hamburger meat being cut with a knife. When asked to explain their interpretation of the videos, the artist answered, “I think it’s a way of feeling empowered over the situation that I was not awake in. That’s what surgery is -- they’re just cutting your flesh.”

Saakred noted that they did not feel vulnerable about the work as they walked through the exhibit, but the months of production leading up to the exhibit induced feelings of vulnerability. “Not everyone wants to or is willing to share their pre-transition image,” said Clare Donnelly, Visual Arts Center Gallery manager. Donnelly stated that Saakred’s willingness to present these objects, videos and documentation of their transition is courageous.

“In a lot of ways, it feels dangerous for the artist to be putting such dangerous work out,” said Christine Gwillim, the exhibit curator and a Performance as Public Practice doctorate student at UT, “and also really generous of them to be willing to share that much of their personal life with the public.”

While Saakred recognizes their courage and generosity for displaying their work, they cannot ignore the potential consequences of being an openly trans artist, especially as a person of color.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, more transgender people have been killed in Texas than any other state. The HRC estimated that at least 15 transgender people have been killed in

Texas since 2015. In the last 16 months, four of those victims were trans women of color who were shot, beaten or choked to death.

“The reality is, not only do I feel like I’m a threat, there’s actually a threat for me,” Saakred said.

“I’m paranoid all the time about who’s going to see me or attack me because I’m trans. Just all kinds of things. There’s no way to know.”