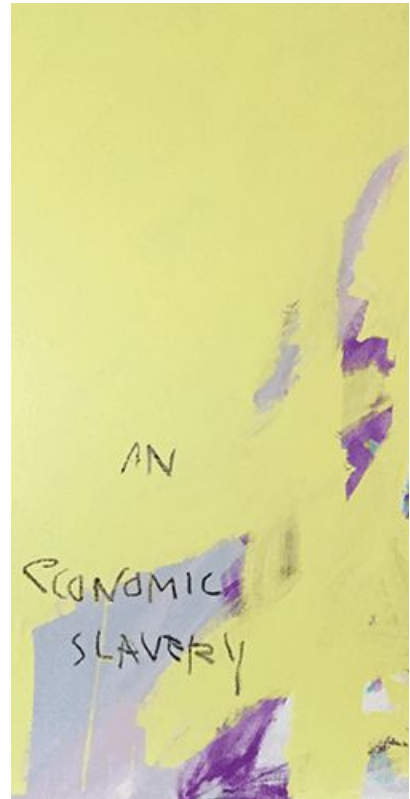


**Nico Amortegui**  
**by: Ellen Gurley**

Some people paint because they like to make happy, little trees. For Nico Amortegui, life, as he has seen it, hasn't been pretty flowers, so he paints what he knows. Most of his characters have suffered through travesties, many are people he has met, and none of them are forgotten. Borrowing mostly from African art, Nico's messages of social injustice and use of some of life's darker themes in his art isn't a burden, it's a necessity. If he doesn't let these people speak through his work, then he will explode, so to speak. That energy absorbed has to be released. "With destruction, I create", Nico says and he goes on to explain that all of the recent occurrences in the political and religious climate internationally and nationally are not only necessary, but they are a promise for change. Once it all comes to a head, then a lot of positive results will come about. "These things have to happen in order for us to move forward", he tells me. "Things have to get bad before they get better".



I was lucky enough to visit Nico in his habitat; a home in the heart of Shamrock Gardens that houses not only his studio but his beloved family. As far as life plans go, Nico won the lottery. He wanted to have a Spanish-speaking household and that he does. Marrying a beautiful woman who majored in Latin American studies, he has the life he always expected, complete with two inquisitive daughters. "We spend the lot of our time and money on travel.", he says, telling me that he and his wife have the same vision; to experience as many different cultures as physically possible.



Just returning from Israel, Peru, Mexico, and Cuba, I chat with Nico about the “what’s next” over a beer, while he occasionally says something in Spanish to his oldest child, who keeps peeking in to see what we are doing. I met Nico many years ago when he and his sister ran their own magazine (a Blü in the beginning of the 2000’s). Now an avid painter, Nico still uses the skills he obtained in fashion, construction, and in (once considered) war-torn Colombia as a child. Like a Native American born in the depression, he uses the whole buffalo, so to speak, in the manufacturing of his sculptures, the remodeling of his home, and the construction of many of his canvases. He wastes nothing. We laughed about the similarities of Greek and Spanish households and he is a very humble person. He has met a lot of people and influenced a lot of them and while a lot of his subjects may be in the middle of hell, as it were, sometimes he has caught them in a rare moment of joy. He tells me “even when people are struggling, they can find beauty or happiness in something as simple as a cup of coffee”.



Though he has laid down some roots in Charlotte, he and his family are not here to stay permanently or at least not year 'round. In order to allow him to grow as an artist, we have to allow him to go. With a lot of his art adorning the walls and yards of some of the most prestigious homes in some of Charlotte's finest neighbourhoods, Nico will always have a special place in his heart for our city.

[NicoArte.com](http://NicoArte.com)

[NicoArte.Tumblr.com](http://NicoArte.Tumblr.com)

**Instagram: Nico\_Mal01**