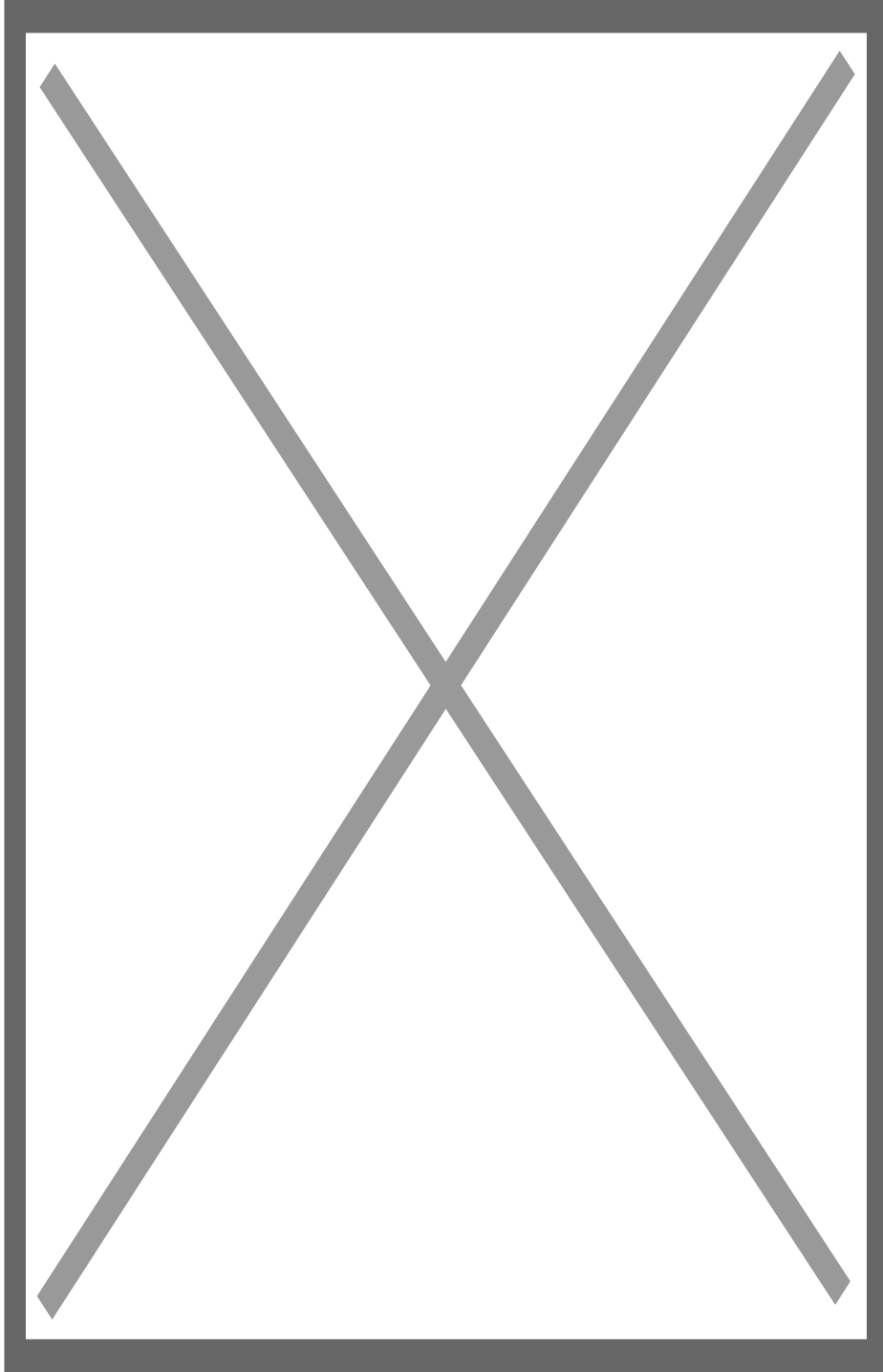


Michelle Angela Ortiz's *Delmy* (Harrisburg, top) and *Eres Mi Todo* (Philadelphia, bottom) from the *Familias Separadas* series

by [Yohana A. Junker](#) in the [April 2026](#) issue

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Top: Photo by Salina Almanzar. All images used by permission of the artist.

Michelle Angela Ortiz is a visual artist, filmmaker, and community arts educator whose work insists that public space is never neutral. For more than two decades, Ortiz has used murals, site-specific installations, and collaborative processes to surface histories that have been deliberately erased, particularly those of immigrant, Black, and Latine communities. Her artworks transform walls, streets, and civic landmarks into sites of witness, grief, and collective refusal and persistence. Her work is deeply grounded in public life and can be experienced in spaces where the stakes of visibility are most urgent.

One of Ortiz's most powerful projects, *Familias Separadas*, marks sites connected to the detention and deportation of immigrant families in Pennsylvania. Beginning in 2015, she installed temporary public artworks at locations such as ICE offices, city hall, and public markets, working closely with undocumented people in partnership with grassroots organizations. These works demanded attention by naming the violence embedded in systems that fracture families.

The project expanded to highlight 14 mothers held for years at the Berks County Residential Center, a family detention center with a documented record of human rights abuses. Ortiz visited the families there and remained in relationship with them after their release. Their stories emerged in Ortiz's public installations across the state and in her documentary *Las Madres de Berks*. One permanent mural, depicting Delmy and her son, stands in Allison Hill, a historically neglected neighborhood near the state capitol in Harrisburg.

Ortiz's murals and installations ask us to look while being looked at. In meeting the gaze of those rendered invisible, we are compelled to confront our assumptions, prejudices, and moral evasions. This reversal of spectatorship summons an ethics of testimony: a demand that we move beyond witnessing injustice to becoming implicated in it. In these fraught times, Ortiz asks whether art can unsettle our complacency and move us toward solidarity, accountability, and the active protection of lives that are under threat.