

THE CULTUREMAP INTERVIEW

## Austin artist Xavier Schipani is exactly who the world needs right now

By [Katie Friel](#)

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The artist's installation as part of 29Rooms. Photo by Xavier Schipani

If you live in Austin, chances are you know Xavier Schipani's work. (Actually, if you live in Austin, chances are you just know Xavier.) Before it shuttered, Schipani's mural on the side of Arro made driving down West Sixth Street actually compelling, while the branding he did for Irene's has turned the restaurant into one of the most Instagram-worthy spots in town.

Over the past few years, the artist has been tapped to work on projects ranging from Pease Park Conservancy to la Barbecue. His signature style is instantly recognizable, and his work examines humanity within and without the constraints of gender in sometimes funny and subversive ways.

And though known locally for his large-scale murals (in 2016 he was named Best Muralist by the Austin Chronicle), Schipani's work extends far beyond the walls of Austin. Over the past year, he has shown everywhere from Paris to Los Angeles, and has garnered a cult-like following on Instagram where the artist shares daily drawings inspired by life, gender identity, sexuality, politics, the policing of bodies, and everything in between. (His dogs, Bette Davis and Papi, also make appearances.)

There is a sense that Schipani's work is as much a calling as it is a force compelling him to create. "I feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility to be honest about myself and my community which is transgender/queer," says Schipani. "I find a great deal of purpose in sharing work that it is personal so that others have the courage to do so as well."

In September, the artist traveled to New York City to share that work as part of 29Rooms, a Fashion Week pop-up hosted by Refinery29. Schipani was invited to help Transparent producer/creator Jill Soloway and

# lora reynolds gallery

production company Topple create an installation that examined gender identity. “My work is ... meant to challenge the ‘norm,’ but also elevate voices that are often unheard,” says Schipani.

The final piece, a restroom installation/ trans-safe space created in Schipani’s trademark style, beautifully captured these unheard voices — as well as the attention of the New York Times. “It’s important for people to have some visual identity to go with the conversation about gender identity,” he told the paper.

In December, audiences on the West Coast will have the opportunity to see the piece in person when 29Rooms opens in L.A. Those in New York City can catch Schipani next spring during a show at Superchief Gallery in Brooklyn. For those of us in Austin, Xavier’s latest mural can be found at la Barbecue’s new home in the Quickie Pickie on East Cesar Chavez.

## **The interview**

**What does success look like to you?** Being able to travel, show my work, and share it with those who need to see it.

**Life goal in three words:** Be my best.

**What was the last test you had to take:** “Which Housewife are you?” (I’m Nene Leakes.)

**Other than Austin, favorite city?** New York City

**What was your AIM screen name growing up?** Wopgenius4hire

**What’s your comfort meal:** Avgolemono, a chicken and lemon soup.

**Last book you read:** Black Chalk by Christopher Yates. I’m currently reading Janet Mocks’ Redefining Realness.

**Deep Eddy or Barton Springs:** Deep Eddy

**Next big thing to come out of Austin:** The Central Library

**What is your greatest extravagance?** Martinis and caviar. Or art supplies.

**What is the question you would add to this list?** Do you believe in the existence of aliens?