



PICANTE: LATINO INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN CULTURE

CURATED BY CECILIA HUTCHINSON REYNOLDS

MAY 21ST – JULY 10TH, 2004

ATHICA: Athens Institute for Contemporary Art is pleased to present its last exhibit of the season, *picante: latino influence on american culture*, curated by ATHICA board member, cecilia hutchinson reynolds. Ms Reynolds is a Cuban-American artist who relocated to Athens in the spring of 2003 from Brooklyn, NY. The artists she has chosen include both Latino artists and those influenced by Latino culture, with media ranging from painting and sculpture to photography, video, performance and installation. They hail from around the US, and address a wide range of salient issues, many politically charged. While some are originally from South and Latin America and some are, like the curator, of Hispanic Descent, others without Hispanic heritage find artistic inspiration in Latino culture. While the Latino influence will be felt on many levels, both complex and understated, all the artists included share an interest in an issue vital to anyone who lives in the NE GA community today. Not only has the number of Latino residents in the Southeast US tripled in the last decade, a conservative estimate of the number of Latino residents in Athens-Clarke County is 6%, well above the 1% average for Georgia overall. While the 2000 census officially lists the number of A-CC Latino residents at 7,000, many social workers cite 20,000. With this exhibition, ATHICA celebrates and explores the increasingly prevalent influence of Latino culture, felt more than ever in today's food, music, dance, style, and language.

Many of the artists reference Latino rituals and traditions such as Xavier Tavera's portrait of a couple out-on-the-town, while others literally document events. Mary Teresa Giancoli explores the food, traditions, festivals and holidays of Mexican Culture in New York. Her photographs of the universal rituals shared between mothers and daughters are depicted with a uniquely Mexican flavor. This influence even manifests itself in the most fundamental American store, the supermarket. For instance, items that up until recently one would expect to find only in an ethnic market are for sale at major chain groceries stores. Heather Ryan Kelley's paintings of Spanish brand foods are strangely familiar to every starving artist accustomed to eating rice and beans. Another painter who relies heavily on social iconography is Miguel Ángel Ávila. His surrealist landscape, loaded with imagery associated with illegal immigrants, floats over a Mexican Flag.

Clayton Frost Merrell takes his inspiration from the ex-voto paintings he saw in churches while living in Oaxaca, Mexico. Merrell's paintings are faithful copies of the originals, except that the figures and narrative texts have been left out. Leaving only the ambiguous, visionary and confusing landscapes, he juxtaposes the mundane with the heavenly. These paintings, made at a time when there were a number of politically motivated killings in Mexico, attempt to talk about the tragedy of the politically "disappeared." The video work of Gabriel Martinez, Roxana Pérez-Méndez, and Carlos Rodriguez captures the great sense of community celebration, yet is inherently politically charged. The group met in Skowhegan, Maine where they collaborated to create a piece for a very traditionally American 4th of July parade. The Latin-themed Carosa, or parade float, made with layers of bizcocho (cake), became a carnal throne that carried the pageant princess/saint/martyr. Gabriela Bertiller subverts the equestrian portrait tradition in her large-scale donkey painting. Although the donkey historically has been characterized as a slow and

humble pack animal, Bertiller's meticulous beadwork glamorizes the donkey and its status as a laborer to heroic proportions.

Through painting, Sara Eichner explores the tension between the collective and the individual. Eichner subtly pares down the building façades of East Williamsburg, Brooklyn's predominately Puerto Rican neighborhood, to brightly patterned structures. Another painter whose palette is strongly affected by her environment is Kim Squaglia. Her "Tabasco" colored paintings were made while working in a tortilla factory in San Antonio, Texas. In the same way that language barriers can distort meaning, Raul Mendez's delicate drawings of the fragmented narratives are open to multiple readings.

Economic issues are addressed in some of the work such as Javier Lara's aggressive performance piece dealing with the oil struggle in Venezuela. The controversial figure, Pablo Escobar, is the subject of Oscar Alzate's mixed media installation addressing the Columbian drug trade. Kathy Windrow takes a less cynical approach by celebrating our collective ancestors in a Day of the Dead altar. Maria Lupo's mythical creatures also suggest the archetypal and universal nature of culture.

The absurd and comical films and videos of Michael Oliveri and Melissa Friedling deal with Latino stereotypes such as the Latin lover and the migrant worker. Finally, Richard Lou marries the ultimate example of mainstream American taste with the Chicano culture of southern California. Lou's digital media series follows the virtual "Barrio Wars" happening within the backdrop of Thomas Kinkade paintings.

ATHICA is fortunate that several area luminaries will participate in affiliated events throughout the exhibition run. Well-known local monologist Stephanie Astalos-Jones will be creating a special evening's entertainment in collaboration with Atlanta thespian Priscilla Smith, who is fluent in Spanish. The duo will present dueling monologues in both languages as well as 'Spanglish,' addressing politics and more.

Franklin Professor of English at the University of Georgia, and acclaimed novelist Judith Ortiz Cofer will read from her work about growing up in Puerto Rico (June 16th, 2004).

A closing celebration will be held on Saturday, July 10th, 7.00–9.00 pm, which will be a benefit for The People of Hope, the non-profit group that formed to relocate the predominantly Latino residents of the former Garden Springs trailer park. We hope you can join us for Ms Reynolds spicy take on this rich and varied issue.

CHECKLIST FOR PICANTE

OSCAR ALZATE

La Historia de Pablo Escobar (2002)
Mixed media installation

MIGUEL ÁNGEL ÁVILA

Flag Composition I (2002)
Acrylic on panel

GABRIELA BERTILLER

Con Paciencia (2002)
Oil on canvas (with glitter and sequins)

SARA EICHNER

Williamsburg, South Side: red stone siding
(2003)

Williamsburg, South Side: pink wood grain siding (2003)

Williamsburg, South Side: blue stone siding, (2003)

Williamsburg, South Side: overlapping green shingles (2003)
Oil on birch panel

MELISSA FRIEDLING

Ex-mex (2004)
DVD film, 5:17 min.

Mercedes at Morro Castle (2004)
DVD film, 3:30 min.

MARY TERESA GIANCOLI

Mother and daughter with lipstick,
Mexican Arts Festival, Queens, NY (2000)

Mother and daughter, Feria del Sol, 14th Street, Manhattan (2002)
Silver gelatin print photography

HEATHER RYAN KELLEY

Goya (1995)
Oil on canvas

El Jibarito (2005)
Oil on canvas

JAVIER LARA

Venezuela: a forgotten country (2004)
Performance documentation, Baltimore, MD, 45 min.

RICHARD LOU & ROBERT J. SANCHEZ

Los Anthropolocos Discover Barrio Kinkade! (2003)
Interactive Digital Media (Los Anthropolocos, Chicano Artists Lou and Sanchez, have been collaborating since 1992.)

MARIA LUPO

Porca Miseria III (2003)
Mixed media (feathers, wire, acrylic)

Vacca Santus (2002)
Mixed media (concrete, acrylic)

GABRIEL MARTINEZ, ROXANA PÉREZ-MÉNDEZ & CARLOS RODRIGUEZ

Independencia Part 1: La Parada, (2000)
Performance documentation,
Skowhegan, ME

Independencia Part 2: El Regreso (2000)
Performance documentation,
Skowhegan, ME

Ephemera from Independencia Part 1 & Part 2 (2000)
Mixed media

RAUL MENDEZ

Her gravity, illustrated (2003)
Graphite and oil on paper

CLAYTON FROST MERRELL

Desaparecidos #1 (2000)

Desaparecidos #2 (2000)

Desaparecidos #3 (2000)

Desaparecidos #4 (2000)

Desaparecidos #5 (2000)
Oil on tin mounted to plywood

MICHAEL OLIVERI

El Pollo Doh Loco (1994)
Video, 2 minutes, documentation of
performance at Crossing Gallery, LA,
CA

Still Smoking and Happy (2000)
Video, 11 minutes

KIM SQUAGLIA

Fuego y hielo (2001)
Oil and resin on panel

XAVIER TAVERA

Los De Rojo, (2004)
Ink jet on canvas

KATHY WINDROW

Ofrenda para Linda Schele (2004)
Mixed media installation

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501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your
contributions are needed and are
federally tax-deductible.

GALLERY HOURS:

Thursdays & Fridays 3:00 - 9:00 p.m.,
Saturdays: 1:00 - 6:00 p.m.

*Gallery Hours are staffed by volunteer
sitters. Would you like to help out?*

*Email us at info@athica.org or call
706.208.1613.*

SCHEDULE OF AFFILIATED EVENTS:

- **SATURDAY, MAY 22ND, 7.00–9.00PM**
OPENING RECEPTION SATURDAY, JULY
10TH, 7.00–9.00PM
- **WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16TH, 7.00–9.00PM**
READING BY JUDITH ORTIZ COFER
- **SATURDAY, JUNE 26TH, 8.00PM**

LA CABEZA DE DOS LENGUAS (THE HEAD
OF TWO TONGUES) MONOLOGUES
PRESENTED BY PRISCILLA SMITH AND
STEPHANIE ASTALOS-JONES, IN BOTH
SPANISH AND ENGLISH

- **SATURDAY, JULY 10TH, 7.00–9.00PM**

CLOSING EVENT: BENEFIT FOR THE
PEOPLE OF HOPE: MUSIC TBA
