



Blue Star 13



Contemporary Art for San Antonio
Blue Star Art Space

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by Marcia Sampson-Hayslip

Introduction

Inside the Loop: Blue Star 13 is the 13th exhibition of selected artists from the San Antonio art community and the first which, since becoming director, I have had the opportunity to curate. Mounted each year during Contemporary Art Month, the Blue Star exhibit originated in 1986 and has evolved into an important signal of San Antonio's growing and dynamic cultural identity.

As far as we know, personal identity is today no longer fixed nor based on origin but, in keeping with the complex social as well as cultural transformations, it prevails in a continuous process of interaction, influences and even changes. No great city can survive by culturally standing still and, to live in San Antonio without contemporary art is like driving a covered wagon to work. This is because territorial and historical identities stem from both the past and the present.

Along with art around the world, San Antonio's contemporary art survives as part of a relentless homogenization of culture driven by the nature of the marketplace and its objectives. This homogenization, among other elements, has placed the discourse of identity in jeopardy. While San Antonio's art is considered by many to be "traditional", today's art mixes regional and

provincial traditions with currently circulating discourses and circumstances. Within this process, installation art can be one more tradition, albeit a contemporary one. Paradoxically, it comes as no surprise since artists have for centuries been at the forefront of change. This situation has shown that while Russian artist Ilya Kabokov's *Kitchen* or San Antonio artist Chris Sauter's *Kitchen* are both kitchens, each work references distinctly different cultural traditions. These artists, next to many others, are examples of the ways that contemporary art has evolved into a means of visually communicating across boundaries rather than constructing fortresses and tribal badges.

None of the artists in Inside the Loop: Blue Star 13 proposes one identity nor one tradition for our city. Rather the artists and exhibit propose that San Antonio be inclusive and embrace the intellectual and art market considerations that contemporary art is an integral part of. In this context, it is the purpose of Blue Star Art Space, by means of this exhibition, to encourage the problematic advancement of tradition and identity and, to openly free limitations in artistic vision and thought in our community.

According to the above, the main question this exhibit poses is the following: what characterizes the 'contemporary' aspects in contemporary art

in San Antonio? No single exhibition can provide definitive answers for such a concern. However, by taking Inside the Loop: Blue Star 13 as a curatorial framework around a collection of artworks, the question clearly highlights a paradox. If tradition continues to be carved in old Texas limestone, it can also become the authority of identity issues that include traditions and the development of abstraction, figuration, social realism, or any other art movement. Moreover, tradition and identity unfold simultaneously as the raw material from which all artists mold new aesthetic ideas and forms into a contemporary discourse. Thus, within the parameters shown here, an exhibit such as this one responds to the need of contemporary artists to creatively solve this paradox.

Expanding on this paradox, the exhibit develops along two main concerns: complex relations of body and psyche through the transformation of everyday household objects and experimentation propelled by the artists' diverse intentions. In addition to this, both concerns often overlap with issues of consumerism and communication.

Michele Monseau presents a large scale installation that touches on childhood angst, made of materials such as flocked fabric, nylon stockings, and plaster. Three brightly colored, crushed velvet platforms function as stages for hanging multi-color fabric bars that have hoof shaped endings. The artist experiments with perceptions

of color, both two and three dimensional, as well as with cultural associations that blend today's color preferences with those of the past. **Dario Robleto's** central focus is to question, twist and bend the commodification of culture. In this instance, he transforms mass-produced objects and materials through a laborious process of injecting them with new, often emotional, and complex histories. His iconographic work is a metaphor for all the minute things, such as discardable consumer items, that may contain unknown or even unseen magnitudes of personal and cultural meaning. **Chris Sauter's** site created **Kitchen** turns utilitarian architecture into a metaphor for the gene pool. What appears to anchor and structure our lives are now essentially organic processes in constant flux and transformation. **Alba De León** uses paint and window screen to create kinetic patterns and minimal fields that shift, shimmer and create a transparency and quality which suggests spaces we aspire to go. Her work alludes to a depth that embellishes their surfaces and monochromatic appearance.

Callida Borgnino and Chris Musgrave produced a video that is nestled within a soft, rounded and fabric-lined wall where images float in magical suspension. Cloud formations build and revolve, into other semblances and for a brief spell, the viewer is in unison with a rapid multiplicity of voices and rhythms. **Philip Avila's** photographic and paper works, assembled from elements

of digital design, Internet jokes and other recycled imagery and texts, expose the social complexities and inordinate variations of dysfunctional family and sexual behaviour. **Michele Pedraza's** overlapping projections simulate the tradition of collage by stitching and combining images of architecture and the body, paced at the beat of a collective pulse. **Jannette Morales's** installation explores notions of identity in the face of television's omnipresence. A fast paced video on multiple monitors brings images of private and public events, simultaneously signaling past and present meaning and form. **Justin Boyd and Mike Addkison's** site specific sculpture combines concepts on passages, D.J. culture, measures of space-time and the properties of sound and light waves. Approaching a large wall, viewers hear the sound of what appears a resonating beam coming from behind the wall, to then discover it is emitted from inside, at the center of exits and entrances. **Scott Lifshutz'** photographic composite is a strobe-like focus on objects of glamour and desire, taste turned into abstracted seduction and luxury elevated to an ubiquitous level by packaging and display.

Moses Gonzales began drawing on found handkerchiefs and commissary bags in prison to communicate with loved ones and effect personal and social change. His black and white renderings mobilize the 'Guadalupana' painting tradition beyond its commonly accepted colorful

representation. **María Elena Botello Buchanan's** sculptures convey a concern with new age therapies as an alternative to the body's impermanence. The work questions an industry of products and transcendental methods that promises to arrest the unstoppable effects of aging and gravity. **Yvonne Guerra's** small intricate etchings of microscopic organisms and cells are presented like laboratory samples stored for examination in file drawers while also invisible and hidden like forgotten events. **Patrick Yarrington** strives to render his acrylic and glue paintings free of any boundary or restrictive structure so the eye can explore the subtle shifts of its color and surfaces as it would if gazing at the sky or into the ocean.

Finally, what Inside the Loop: Blue Star 13 clearly demonstrates is that the dynamics of experimentation, added by a wide spectrum of concepts and art, are part of the pieces that make up the puzzle of contemporary art for San Antonio today.

Carla Stellweg, July 1998



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