UNCOMMON *Ground*

23 Latin American Artists

Uncommon Ground: 23 Latin American Artists

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During the past few years we have witnessed in and around the New York City area and the East Coast, a series of exhibitions dealing with art from Latin America. There have been large group shows that exalted the "fantastic" and highlighted the distinct "otherness" of Latino art, and historical blockbuster shows that aimed to sell the image of a particular nation, or focus on a specific period of the arts in the Americas. There have been smaller, in-depth surveys of individual artists from various Latin American countries, and shows which tried to come to terms with constituency and the rapid change in U.S. demographics—the increase in the number of Hispanics.[1] In 1992—the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the "New World"—the public also has been able to view exhibitions that aim to examine the radical encounter between Europe and the Americas.[2]

Uncommon Ground: 23 Latin American Artists, organized by the College Art Gallery at the State University of New York College at New Paltz, brings together a group of Latin American artists whose work and lives have stretched the notion of origin, or "ground." The majority of the artists in this exhibition share the circumstance of living and working in the United States, outside and at a distance from their native countries. This exhibition presents Latin American art in all of its diversity, and defies the common and mistaken notion that all Latinos can be grouped into a single, homogenous, "Hispanic" category.[3] In observing the rich diversity and distinctiveness of each artist's work, it becomes clear how senseless it is to seek to define a single, unifying thread in Latin American art.

Latin American artists face many choices in defining their responses to being "encapsuled" as though from one large, geographic whole that stretches from the Rio Grande to Patagonia. Having already come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and now in confrontation with a multiethnic society in the United States, they find that their initial diversity is further stretched. Through their art we are invited to examine the fallacy of a Latin American "ground," and experience new perceptions that result from this plurality. By allowing the artists' varied approaches to surface and the "uncommon" to exist, the exhibition renders a kaleidoscopic view which resists categorizations.

While this exhibition aspires to articulate the "uncommon-ness" in their work, it also acknowledges that when the focus is on politics or social issues, these artists have a shared understanding when Latin America is concerned. The history and culture of colonization, the violence of military police state practices, and a recurring and increasingly large population living in poverty and deprivation are common denominators. Yet the artists work in uncommon ways, translating this into their own individual artistic language.

From the plundering of the Potosi silver mines, starting in the 16th century, to the current devastation of the Amazonia, colonization and exploitation have had an effect not only on people, but on nature as well. In a broad sense, the "ground" we are concerned with is not just the solid surface we stand on, the earth, but a profound connection to nature: that matter *from* which, or *on* which anything originates, rises and takes direction. In Latin America, nature continues to be respected as a nurturing source, the embodiment of creation.[4] The visual representations of the natural in Latin American culture include the human body in a situation of equality, not to be placed separately and outside, but as another intrinsic variant of all that is born, grows, and dies. It is not the object of fashion and its correlated ideas of marketed and consumed beauty, nor just a recipient of abuse in its most perverse extremes; it is the subject, the superior instrument of creativity.

In the art of several of the women presented in this exhibition, one senses the "uncommon-ness" in their contrasted views on nature and the human presence. In the work of Ana Mendieta, Santería functions as a primary source of inspiration. This earth-centered Afro-Cuban religion includes a pantheon of female deities and priestesses (Orishas), which

Mendieta came to believe in, especially in relationship to the life-giving powers of nature and the idea of the Great Mother.[5] In this sense, the idea of power is devoid of the domination of male authority. It is the power to heal, and the feminine power of nature/earth as the beginning, the womb. Ana Mendieta's early childhood experience of being sent from Cuba to an Iowa orphanage also is reflected in her work: it is demonstrated in her concern over the loss of identity. Thus, the emerging forms that she chose to work with came first from her own body, interacting and digging into the earth, and later were transformed into the *Silueta* series with more and varied archetypal female shapes. Her body earth sculptures, the photographic works, the burnished leaves, and wood pieces—all of her works—show her continued search for a ritualist and animist-connected identity in which art and life fuse into one complete whole.

After Ana's tragic death in 1985, her sister, Raquel Mendieta, created work which acquired a *sui generis* type of syncretic art in which she incorporated both her own and Ana's facial features. In "Roots and Memories," 1992, Raquel Mendieta creates a wing-shaped female figure, composed of cork and painted with gold and red, the colors that represent the Santería deities, Oshun and Shangó. The figure's shape echoes that of the island of Cuba, and it is suspended from the ceiling in a precarious situation of balance. From its breasts emerge half-smoked Cuban cigars, and coffee tins dangle from the abdomen. On the floor, the artist has placed an assortment of tree roots, dried leaves, seeds, and fruits of Cuban origin, set in a composition of an altar offering. Ana's face and hers are one, or have become a third identity, allowing Ana and the work she did during her short life to become dual "deities" in Raquel's work—a life-giving force once more.

By contrast, Teresa Serrano, from Mexico, alludes to the representation of the body/figure through its omission. In this absence, the body acquires at times an even stronger presence. We sense the body's immanence through her spiritual belief in the wisdom and mysticism of nature. Serrano's delicate, yet strong tactile handling of the materials is a hopeful reminder that in the act of setting up and constructing "altars" and "offerings" to the dead, we are participating in a ritual of communion. We are becoming part of the past, present, and future by celebrating and commemorating the dead—not just the people in our lives and the lives of our brothers and sisters, but everything in nature. In her paintings, Serrano's sensitive use of words and texts, written by herself or by other poets, also underscores the presence, somewhere offscreen, of a body—one laden with living traditions. In "La décima estación" ("The Tenth Station")—of the cross, we intuit—the presence of the *rebozo* highlights the female body's departure. The *rebozo*, one of the most sophisticated and humble multipurpose female garments that survived from the colonial times in Mexico, is here connected to a devotional attitude of mourning. In other works, Serrano uses a variety of flowers associated by their shapes and colors to the duality of love and sex: passion, loss, remembrance, solitude, reunion, and so on—feelings that take form. All of Serrano's work, whether incorporating language, numbers, traditional symbols, or architectural spaces, moves the viewer poetically as though by an internal sun. Such is the intensity of the light/warmth with which she imbues her imagery.

This "feminist" approach to art-making is something that Serrano shares with other Latin American women artists, such as Alicia Barney and Ana María Maiolino. It is diametrically opposed and strongly contrasted with the work of feminist artists in the United States, who deal with the subjects of media, cynicism, oppression in the form of paternalism, sexual abuse, and so on. This art is about the eternal natural force that women have been and continue to be. The celebration of this strength is by no means tentative or sketchy; it carries a resonance beyond the physicality of the body and into a state of mind.

On another level, Latin American art, particularly that produced by the artists living in the United States at least part of the time, is not made in a cultural vacuum. Here the artists are confronted with not only "American" art, but that of their African-American, Asian-American, and Native American counterparts. Ever since the Conquest and the imposi-

tion of other cultural models, whether violently or otherwise, Latin Americans have responded to colonization through a complex process that includes resistance and a random, as well as selective, assimilation of Spanish, Indian, African, and Asian cultural forms. Cross-cultural, new, and hybrid visual representations existed in Latin America long before becoming the subject of intellectual discourse in the United States and Europe. Unlike in the United States, where "Latino" has a racial connotation—"non-white"—in Latin America one can be Cuban with Jewish Lebanese forebears; Venezuelan of German or Polish stock, Mexican of Aztec, Mayan, and French ancestry; Peruvian of Inca, Dutch, and Russian descent; and so on. With this plurality of voices and the psychological responses to this blending, many different cultural contributions are revealed. In the United States it is assumed that cross-cultural borrowing is a successful strategy when in the hands of the mainstream. By the same token, Latin American and other so-called "marginal" art which results from similar cross-cultural strategies can no longer be considered derivative.

The strict divisions of high and low art—the categorizations of folk and craft versus fine art—operate differently in Latin America than in the United States. Past traditions for some are living traditions for many others. When the Latin American artist attempts to repossess the obliterated past and its artistic heritages, he/she does not necessarily deny the present art forms. It is fair to say that this coming to terms with the introduction of new and sometimes foreign models does not just occur from the outside inward. It also is generated within each nation/state's own version of authoritarian power and mass media structures. This has meant that in Latin America, among other things, the local and regional popular art forms are disappearing at a rapid pace as well. The urban middle classes are scarcely interested in their own living traditions other than to coopt them into a "nationalist" representation that can be exported for consumption, creating more misconceptions surrounding the nature of identity. Therefore, to cross over could also mean to doublecross the very thing that was intended to be repossessed in an integral way.[6]

Despite this, it still appears that we are all at the crossroads of something new, of being in an unsettled landscape where all categories are equally questionable, where national borders are no longer borders, where nations/states/ethnic groups are breaking all definitions of former ideologies, and where the politics of power can no longer control, unless by force. Many Latin American artists no longer view the United States or other Western powers as colonizers in the traditional sense, but rather in the sense that these powers control the computerized world economic markets that determine what happens in Bogotá, Boston, or Bombay. The equal sharing in the distribution of these wild gambles seems every day further removed from the initial idea of democracy. Colonization essentially has been replaced by "corporatization." In this post-industrial scenario, some Latin American artists have addressed the concept of a new order/disorder and globalization of the media's insidious presence.

Jaime Davidovich, from Argentina, has done this ambitiously by creating a series of small, theatrical video-installation sculptures that in a cacophonous jumble of imagery and sound, simultaneously brings everyone and every issue together in an attempt to make a "teatro de la memoria," an encyclopedic tour de force. This series was begun in 1989 with "Treasure Island." Seemingly a spoof, it aims to analyze the Argentinian immigrant in Manhattan trying against all odds to retain his/her dignity and Latino identity while performing by-now-stereotypical tangos such as "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" (from *Evita*) or "Adios muchachos compañeros de mi vida."

Regina Vater, from Brazil, in a more meditative fashion, carves out her ideas of the "Elemental" in a video piece by that name. It is part of a larger, on-going work dealing with Brazilian and world environmental issues. Vater was greatly influenced by the writings of Oswaldo de Andrade (his theory of Brazilian culture being anthropophagous) and the open-ended approaches espoused by the avant-garde artist Helio Oiticica. Thus, Vater's art includes photography, film, video, and installations.

Luis Gonzalez Palma
La lotería, 1991, (The Lottery)
assembled silver gelatin prints
with paint and ink
70 x 70"
Courtesy
Howard Greenberg Gallery
Photo:
The Art Institute of Chicago

With *Alice in Wonderland* in mind, Vater, seeing through the looking glass, observes the earth being colored by the ecologically damaging effects of our waste and carelessness. "We are abandoning the earth as a central place. . . . We take the diseases of the earth to other planets."[7] The child of *Alice in Wonderland* is no longer imagining the world, but is a part of the human virus that destroys.

In Luis Gonzalez Palma's "La lotería," the local environment—the natural and therefore human landscape of his native Guatemala—becomes raw material for a Latin American type of *tableaux vivants*. In a sequential setup of nine equally-sized, large-format photographs, the Maya he portrays are donned with wings, moons and sun, devil-like horns, and masks, and they are crowned and staged in a mood of stoic tragedy. This treatment recalls traditional Latin American street photography. In small towns, photographers set up shop next to churches, in parks, or in central town plazas, with backdrops and props of faraway places probably unknown to the sitters, such as the Swiss Alps or Roman temples. These occasions offered the customers a chance to envision themselves in imaginary spaces, outside of their given reality. In Gonzalez Palma's hands, this tradition is turned around in such a way that the models are not acting out, but become the symbols they are wearing, creating a profound impact on the viewer. Gonzalez Palma is more than just a witness. His subjects, the Maya, are portrayed as their own interpreters. They demonstrate a persistence to restore their mythological history, the spirit of ancient beliefs—their identity. The answer to the onslaught of Western influences among them is caught in each "La lotería" participant: resilient and alone, but still together in what can be called a game of lottery of the individual. The photographic medium has given Gonzalez Palma the perfect tool with which to create his vision of reality. He tears, colors, and otherwise defaces his prints, unlike the straight photograph which captures reality as the camera/eye sees it.

Juan Sanchez, born in Brooklyn of a migrant, black, working-class family from Puerto Rico, also employs photography in a non-traditional way. In the case of Sanchez, photography is not a tool for analyzing the ways in which mass media have stereotyped the Puerto Rican, NuYorican, or Latino peoples; instead, photography serves to integrate and restore a broken or fragmented, multilayered identity. Sanchez offers a politically charged "poetics of resistance," whereby the elements used in racism are revealed to be the very essence of cultural pride. His photographs, taken by himself or by others, are placed on equal footing, and they fuse with texts that are done in a childlike, crayon-notebook fashion. He inscribes these on and around images that include indigenous Santería and Catholic symbols, Taino petroglyphs, flags, barbed wire, flowers—all carriers of feelings that belong to a Latino community's attachments. The writings speak of Puerto Rican independence, of freedom, and of those that died for their cause. One such text reads: "Allí donde fueron asesinados despiadadamente dos jóvenes patriotas, se hierguen dos cruces. Allí donde creyendo que asesinado dos jóvenes asesinaban y acallaban la conciencia de un pueblo, se levantan dos cruces como recuerdo y advertencia: somos un pueblo digno y sensible. El crimen de Maravilla no se olvidará!"[8] This text in "Mixed Statements," 1984, suggests a 16th-century Nahuatl poem of lamentation—a litany for the sacrifices, a celebratory chant for their memory. The painting and its writing resound with history. The echoes of a remote past and an affinity with the more recent writings of Cesar Vallejo or Alejo Carpentier, combined with painted images of today's urban Latino culture, bring this work to life. It renders hope and affirmation of the human spirit.

In "La Colonia," 1992, Sanchez reworks the central image of "Mixed Statements," in which the *independistas*' heads are covered with a Puerto Rican flag hood. In "La Colonia," an isolated individual is hidden behind a painted Puerto Rican flag, and we only see a glimpse of his hair falling down on the slim, dark-skinned torso of a man. He is placed dead center, inside a black cross. On the surrounding black of the cross we see circular dots which contain the image of Jesus' sacred heart. They appear to have been scattered on an altar, in the same manner as roses or other

flowers of passion. But they also recall the spots that AIDS victims develop. The inscribed text states that the colony (or colonization) is the real and true AIDS ("La colonia es el verdadero SIDA"). The popular *estampas* (small religious images bought at neighborhood *botánicas*) attest to the power of the heart—the sacred heart that has been sacrificed—while the central image of the presumed AIDS victim seems to tell us that colonization and all of its hidden viruses are crucifying the individual. The specificity of this painting appears to be a new departure for Sanchez. Whereas in previous works the political messages were imbued by a suggestive poetry, he now addresses this charged issue of our society's disease—AIDS—with the explicit directness of the real issue: colonization.

The photographer Sandra Eleta has for over two decades lived and worked in Portobelo, Panama, a once-important port that in the 16th to the 18th centuries connected the Atlantic and Pacific. Portobelo then became a haven for runaway slaves, or *cimarrones*. After the construction of the Panama Canal, Portobelo seemed forgotten to the world, but Sandra Eleta has brought it back, carefully portraying the inhabitants of a place that we know to exist in our collective memory. Despite the straightforward recording of Portobelo's people—Eleta's friends—she does not attempt to simply document their existence. Rather, Eleta captures something they carry within them: their invisible reality, their dignified and joyful spirit, their melancholic reflectiveness, and the presence of an innate wisdom, a belief in life. It is obvious that Eleta's experience of living in Portobelo has resulted in a two-way relationship between herself and her portrait subjects that is completed in the photograph. As Eleta has stated about her commitment to art and her people: "Commitment as such is nothing but a willpower that comes from the outside, has no deliberate sense, nor is it evidently dogmatic, but is a commitment with the heart, with beauty and human dignity. . . . Therefore it is more like a chant."[9]

In the series "Mujeres Campesinas" ("Peasant Women"), Eleta reveals the stoic, proud projections of a peasant woman left alone for long periods of time to care for herself and her children. The stark reality o their existence is combined with an esthetic similar to that of the painti of Jean-Louis David, Courbet, or Delacroix: a curious blending of the monumental themes in European painting and the modest proposal to narrate the lives of friends and neighbors. The seemingly anonymous Portobelans are depicted in such a powerful way that they occupy herc dimensions in our minds. Their example tells us of a reality that we se must be filled with the hardships of Third World, small-town existence while we also observe their strength and their clear and untroubled fac looking into Eleta's lens, and we realize that they contain some of the answers that are lost to our society. Their un-selfconscious and natura truth stays fixed in our memories.

While Sandra Eleta knows the privilege of working in an environment that breathes "home" and "origin," the majority of the artists in exhibition have left their homelands, voluntarily or involuntarily. A m issue facing the Latino/a diaspora artist is that of displacement and dis cation. This produces a search not so much for identity but a search fo something to identify with.[10]

Part of the search for issues, symbols, cultural meanings, and an a to identify with, has today created a hybrid art or one of transcultural-ization, sometimes radical, sometimes subtle. This latter aspect is visib the work of Cándida Alvarez. Her abstracted diptychs offer multiperspective spaces that seem to pull in dual or oppositional directions. Th is little of the immediately recognizable "ethnic" iconography, other th her deadpan, understated, humorous titles, such as "Good Grief," 198 The painting is actually about the deep-felt grief for the departed, the dead. We see a seemingly empty and open melancholic-blue coffin flo diagonally across the top of half of the diptych, and a large, looming, figure in the bottom half, awkwardly slumped across an armchair, aga painted in those sad, glowing blue tones. In all of her paintings we no small niches inhabited by tiny people, frozen in some activity associate with neighborhood barrio life, as in "Celia Playing the Guitar," 1986.

Sandra Eleta
Tonosi, Panama, 1976
from the series
Mujeres Campesinas
(Peasant Women)
silver print
11 x 11"
Collection of the artist
Courtesy Carla Stellweg

Regina Vater
Untitled, 1991-92
mixed media installation
Collection of the artist

Like Alvarez, Arnaldo Roche Rabell is Puerto Rican. However, his work, steeped in Caribbean artistic practices, is closer to that of a previous generation of "surrealists in the New World."[11] Like Wifredo Lam, Roche draws upon this "surrealism" to expose conflicts of personal and social identity. Roche's *frottages* (rubbings) remind us of the work of Yves Klein and Wolfgang Paalen, but go beyond the intellectual or conceptual intentions of Klein and the surreal abstractions of Paalen. In Roche's hands this technical device becomes integral with the subject matter. The objects actually are rubbed in and onto the work, and then worked in with other elements of nature, such as plants and animals—carriers of the actual spirits, instead of representations of the spiritual.

For Roche, painting and creating are the enactment of the ritual; it is the scenario in which body and spirit become one. There is an immediacy in the gestural application and brushstrokes that seems to communicate the artist's urge to be noticed, prodding the viewer from contemplation into response. In "Nobody Is Innocent," 1991, Roche accomplishes this strikingly by placing his self-portrait inside a medallion, placed dead center on a semi-human, large bird. This bird emerges from the background of what appears to be a web of foliage. Roche's self-portrait hangs on the bird's breast, wearing a crown of thorns. The medallion suggests colonial monastic dress. Inside the bird's beak a human face is lurking or hiding, suggesting the pre-Columbian mythological *Caballero Aguila*—an officiating priest who wore the skin and head of animals such as the eagle or jaguar. The bird's legs are human, but its feet are claws; it carries a feathered tail, and its eyes stare at us glaringly. Whether its presence is menacing or foreboding, its role a predator/destroyer or co-creator of the universe, there is a feeling that it is at the primeval center of a physical and psychological jungle.

Shenge Ka Pharaoh, from the Caribbean island of Trinidad, shares this concern with ancestral beliefs and deities. In his work, mostly done on wood, he brings to life a world peopled by spiritual beings. Like Roche, he paints from edge to edge, stacking the figures and their attributes, leaving no surface unpainted. Every inch is the beginning or end of the next, interlinking and forming accumulations of mythical figures. Shenge Ka Pharaoh's faces are masked, sometimes donning skull-like heads, or other times multiheaded or multiarmed and legged. These skeletal structures have voids that suggest bodily organs such as eyes and sexual organs, while there also are real mouths, teeth, and eyes in the faces/masks. This is particularly noticeable in "Altar," a triptych in which the wooden support also carries the additional allusion to the first Afro-Caribbean wood objects made for divinization and devotion. Wood also presents the artist with an ideal surface that is as textural and tactile as the painted figures. In "Sarcophagus," a wooden box, we again observe a baroque accumulation of more and more human, bodily organs and shapes, which causes the viewer to sense that he/she is in the presence of a sacrificial ritual. The spirits are celebrated: they conjure a ceremony of triumph over death, where the fear of disappearing into nothingness has been overpowered. There is nothing artificial or stylized about the embodiment of these mythological beings. Ultimately, through his work, Shenge Ka Pharaoh seeks a solution to suppression/repression, through the capacity to resist and persist with one's own cultural continuity, rescuing memory and history in order to attain the ability to change.

While the art of Shenge Ka Pharaoh and Roche elicits the notion of being about a "liberation from," the work of many Caribbean and African American artists engages in a discourse with the politics of "liberation." In this sense Manuel Macarrulla, from the Dominican Republic, has consistently constructed over the past decade a series of large-scale paintings on the subject of the political conditions in Latin America, with the specific locale being his homeland. He left the island for the United States when he was ten; his journey back and his facing his heritage and cultural traditions was similarly a struggle. In his "Goat Song" series, Macarrulla mingles scenes of the distant past—the Conquest—with that of today's horrors of neocolonialism. However, the paintings are rendered in an almost romantic, classical method, carefully composed, with fore and

background perspectives respected. They could hang next to any 19th-century Hudson River or European landscape paintings and works which seem so remotely idealistic to us today. As Macarrulla himself says: "These pictures are 'Goat Songs' because our word 'tragedy' is derived from the Greek, meaning 'goat song,' and the political situation is frequently tragic. I refer to goats also because I find them very mysterious and worthy of being used as personae for political intrigue."[12] Macarrulla's politically-intentioned paintings transcend the overt explicitness he refers to, and, although figurative, detailed, and to a great extent narrative, they fall into the realm of epic political fantasy paintings—Caribbean island scenes where we feel anything might happen.

One of the most complex "displacements" is that of the Cuban artist living in the United States. When asked in 1981 about that condition of displacement and exile, Ana Mendieta answered: "Although I recognize that it is not one of my concerns, through it, a kind of search—a collision of our roots—is imposed on us. A search that not necessarily is the same for each one nor requires the same channels. Although my new home has become part of me, my roots and cultural identity are tied to my Cuban heritage."[13] And critic Giulio Blanc recently wrote: "The lot of the exile is never an easy one. On the one hand, there is insecurity, unfamiliar people and customs, . . . on the other, fond memories, and even a measure of regret over having left country, family, and friends behind. It should not be forgotten that unlike the immigrant, the exile, at least, in theory, is reluctant to abandon the idea of return. The ties that bind are not all that easily put aside."[14]

The paintings of Nereyda García-Ferraz contain all of the elements mentioned above. Cartoonish, funky, almost day-glow colored, they tell the story with symbolic images and texts. They are representations with which this Cuban exiled artist attempts to construct an image of a world that is whole rather than fragmented. Throughout her work, floating islands, oceans, boats that are coming and going, roosters, goats, dogs, furniture, and so on, all are taking part in a process of disjunction alternated with the reunion of kindred spirits. They are surrounded by words, broken sentences, or popular aphorisms that tie image and language. In "Es agradable pero no es el correr," 1990, ("It is Pleasing, But Running is Not"), an oversized, glowing houseboat is drifting away from the Statue of Liberty into the future horizons of other islands, some connected by a bridge and others populated by winged running dogs or deer. As Nathan Budoff recently observed: "Through all of this, departure is always part of the picture, and ships appear with no apparent destination. This work is about a personal journey, and the construction of a space where the memory and sense of a lost world can be refined."[15]

The most sensitive issues facing artists today are connected to sexual orientation, race, and gender. Mexican-born Roberto Gil de Montes has created poignant work on the subject of AIDS, which he renders in amazingly diverse ways. In his work "Yo no soy monkey," 1991 ("I Am Not a Monkey"), the male figure, wearing a pair of white jockey shorts, has his eyes closed, and seems entranced, while a monkey, donning a cone-shaped hat, is staring point blank into our eyes. On the left, an hourglass filled with red powder is beginning the countdown—the virus has begun? On the right, a plant-mirror reflects a minute pyramid at a far distance, and is growing leaves. Another small monkey is steadying himself on top.

Many of the scenes painted by Gil de Montes are direct references to Los Angeles's mixed racial nightlife; they are theatrical settings in which everyone is assumed to play a role, and we as the audience are inextricably made part of the "teatro humano." But there is another part of Gil de Montes' work that derives from meaningful everyday occurrences. His "daytime" paintings reflect his capacity to handle paint in diverse ways, including a more abstracted figuration. "Eight Ball," 1991, is painted much in the manner of a giant Mexican *retablo* (a small votive painting done on metal adorning churches, shrines, and homes). The glowing, lit-up surface contains mysterious elements such as a wrapped throne, a hovering crucifix, a walking stick growing morning glories, and a floating diamond surrounded by three guardian jaguars walking across the edge of the canvas.

In Gil de Montes' work, "self" and "other" are not radical opposites, but are engaged in a relationship that is in constant change, facing the impermanence of cultural viewpoints. He shares concerns about gender, sexuality, and the male/female duality with his fellow Mexican artists, Alejandro Colunga and Julio Galán, who are part of what has been coined the "neo-Mexicanness" of the eighties.[16]

The work of Alejandro Colunga gained a prominent place in the late seventies and, with Germán Venegas, Ismael Vargas, Nahum Zenil, Adolfo Patiño, and others, he spearheaded this "neo-Mexicanness of the eighties." The movement re-examined popular culture, folklore, urban kitsch, and other vernacular imagery produced outside of the "fine art" canons taught in art school. This, mixed with a rescue and re-definition of the work of early Mexican modern painters, brought about an expressive personal mode grounded in profound social and psychological resources—those of the Catholic religion (sin, damnation, and redemption), and of the spiritual and magic of Mexico's traditions.

Colunga's art reflects a multilayered, built-up, highly baroque type of work that has been called "Sanctus Circus" by Edward Sullivan.[17] The "unreal realities" of Colunga, deriving from what are considered very serious historical sources, are juxtaposed with his childlike playfulness. His "Fish Tanks" series of bronze sculptures placed inside large aquariums is in fact quite humorous. On one hand, the combination of the enormously heavy, drowned bronze bodies surrounded by tiny, live fish, swimming on and around them, establishes a dialogue between the physical and material associated with primeval and animistic beliefs. On the other hand, it also is a comically odd pairing of two radically opposite ideas in art. The dead bodies and the permanence of bronze versus the incredibly busy organic submarine life; the age-old force of water, the womb, with its tiny inhabitants; and the ocean, our own genesis, so to speak—all of this makes for an amusing iconoclastic picture of our existence as well as that of the artist. Colunga's array of crucifixions, saints, virgins, madonnas, Adams and Eves: they all attest to his own mix. His images, steeped in heavy traditional subject matter, are blended with playfulness, fantasies, and dreams of childhood—his and ours. His fascination with provincial radio soap operas and the bloody sacrificial fanaticism of Mexican Catholic and ritual practices, provides Colunga with a natural backdrop of clashing dramas.

In Colunga's imagination, the dreams, memories of childhood, and stories told and retold, serve to liberate the artist's creativity, bringing to life an art peopled by strange, funny, and sometimes frightening beings. In the work of Julio Galán, however, dreams are the substance of reality. Galán's body of work reveals an almost disturbing range of incessant self-centered pathos. His own face is frequently the center of symbolic representations of sexuality or overtly descriptive homoerotic imagery. Still, his work is not simply autobiographical or about an obsessive desire to become his other, female self. Seen from the perspective of Mexico (the sexual constructs of an authoritarian male and macho society), this dream-like journey through multiple metamorphoses could be viewed as a poignant example of the individual's rebellion against the collective and national role models. Of course there are many dense layers to Galán's psyche, persona, and imagery, but the most pervasive element comes from Mexico's complexity, confusions, and fusing of male/female roles. In addition, on a formal level, Galán's work coincides with his eighties contemporaries in the incorporation of popular art forms such as the *retablo*, and his use of popular sayings, puns, and other ambiguously-phrased titles. In "No te has dormido" ("You Haven't Slept"), "El que se viene se va" ("The One that Comes, Goes"), and the work in this exhibition, "Mi hijo" ("My Child"), Galán, in the process of naming the words/symbols and their parallel imagery, points to and refers to a time that is not of this time. This pulls the viewer into his psychic, subconscious world, that of dreams. These dreams have displaced and distorted what in reality we know has been there before.

"Mi hijo," 1991, and other paintings that Galan has done of the Niño Dios (God's baby), for example, allude to a peculiarly Mexican

concept of birth. Octavio Paz has so well defined in his *El laberinto de la soledad (The Labyrinth of Solitude)* the notion of the violated mother, La Malinche (Hernán Cortés's whore), who gives birth to "hijos de la chingada" (sons of nothingness): "La Malinche doesn't resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood and dust. She is the Chingada. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness."[18] In contrast to the Virgin of Guadalupe (the virgin mother), La Chingada is the violated, the raped mother. If Guadalupe is passive, Malinche, La Chingada, is even more passive. Her sin has made her lose her identity. In some cases, La Malinche is used as the gift offered to the conqueror. Jean Fisher, in talking about La Malinche, explains that, Hernán Cortés, by receiving the gift assumes a debt which has not yet been paid. "One might think that at first, by 'collaborating' with the invaders in the destruction of her culture, [La Malinche] is no more than a contemptible symbol of the submission and 'feminization' of the Americas to European 'machismo.' And yet was she not already a gift—a form of currency circulating within the symbolic system of interracial exchange between the Indians?"[19] In rejecting La Malinche (the Mexican Eve), as we see it in José Clemente Orozco's murals, a Mexican breaks his ties with the past, denies his origin and stands alone, surrounded by nothingness and solitude. The flags in Galán's painting underscore this highly-charged national subject matter. In Galán's work, we are in the presence of a new birth, that of "his" child; his art and its birth are something outside of borders and traditions. As Francesco Pellizzi observes: "Julio Galán is on the border, which is not to say that he is *of* the border from whence he came: he was raised near that border which was created 150 years ago between the northern United States of Mexico and the southwestern United States of America. But there is nothing hybrid about his work, or about who he is: Galán is a Mexican, heir to a long and complex multiracial and multicultural tradition of his land."[20]

For Gil de Montes, Colunga, and Galán, the Mexican version of Catholicism has in one way or another exerted a strong influence on their image-making, which is seen in particular in the way their works internalize the concepts and images of sin, damnation, and redemption. Jaime Palacios, who was trained in Mexico, appears to work with these concepts as well. However, the symbols of a "holy" trinity, passion, and salvation do not relate to the baroque and complex Mexican version of Catholicism. The symbols he employs are representations of living forms which have guided human beings for thousands of years in their quest to understand their own existence. In his work he questions why, at the end of the 20th century, we still find these symbols to be inspiring and spiritually relevant. Indeed, man, woman, child, birth, regeneration, salvation, the power of the raised open hand, the heart that is the motor and center of the body, the cup/container (or grail), the vessel of birth, the blood and breath of life—all continue to resonate and are passed from generation to generation. All religious thought has centered on the basic questions of what is life, what is death, and why is there something rather than nothing at all. The evolution of the concept of God and of institutionalized religion has not resolved the question, although all men, women, and children know that they are part of something larger than themselves. Then the question remains: was there life before the creation that exploded into billions of particles and then re-formed into us? Are we mostly spirit or substance? Palacios explains: "My work is basically about what has always been inside human mythology and religious thought. It is that which has to do with our real connection with creation. It has nothing to do with something new. The question has always been the same and is still the same way it was for an alchemist of the 15th century or earlier, . . . the question of why we are here."[21]

Palacios purposely asks "why we are here" instead of the so-often posed question "why are we here." The nuance might seem subtle but implies a profound difference of approach. The man and woman in Palacios' "De la fuente," 1992, ("From the Fountain"), are seen not merely as mother and father but as the protagonists of life, and guardians of the spirit that enables creativity. The blood circulates through veins which are interconnected with the heart, the vessel, and the spirit (child).

In turn, the blood is derived from another vessel outside of their own bodies, outside of the physical substance of which humans are made. They exist in the bath of the universe, in the pool of our beginnings, in which there is no inside or outside. Palacios purposely layers the images over a background of multiple transparencies so that what ultimately remains behind the bodies and spirit is the mystery.

Jaime Palacios' work is not from any specific Latin American place, although he grew up in Mexico and is a contemporary of artists such as Carlos Capelán, Juan Francisco Elso, and Magali Lara. His background is as diverse and hybrid as many of the standards applied today in the art world: he was born in Beijing during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, lived in the Venezuelan Amazonia, grew up in Mexico, has Chilean nationality, and lives in New York. Therefore, he is a child of a borderless world; his work is not grounded in any particular tradition. This "dislocation" has brought about a reaffirmation of an identity based on transculturalization.

Kukuli Velarde, from Peru, works with clay sculptures, placed individually or in groupings; she also creates installations, with or without performance parts, which sometimes are done in combination with a video component. The clay figures are a frightening mix of human, semi-human and animal features, crucified, in torment, contorted, pregnant, at times hermaphrodites, but mostly female. There is writing all over these creatures, in the same manner as bark paper paintings of Mexico's Guerrero and Puebla popular art. The texts, like supplications or curses of damnation, quoted from popular songs, from Third World writers such as Franz Fanon, or from the chroniclers of the Conquest, such as Fray Vicente de Valverde of the 16th century, cry out: "If you seek obstinately to resist, you may rest assured that God will suffer, that you and all your indians shall be destroyed by our arms." And "Malinche's Curse," 1990-92, reads: "Be ashamed of your color, your dreams, your own voice. And, for the centuries to come, bite your own limbs. The arms, so you will reach nothing. The legs, so you will get nowhere. Lick the hands that take away your food, your dignity." In the ongoing project "We, the Colonized Ones," Velarde quite literally has "incorporated" the many wild descriptions of the "bastards" La Malinche was to have given birth to. Or they embody some of the creatures that the Europeans imagined as they read the chroniclers of the Conquest. Velarde's work is a powerful attempt to represent the politics surrounding the varied guises of colonization. Those born as a result of the continued forms of subversive colonial conditions, whether in the United States or Latin America, symbolize the regeneration needed to overcome colonialism. All of her work acts as a stage for the ritual by which redemption is sought and sins are exorcised. The especially compelling parts of this work in process are the various "Niños Dios," babies that are unborn, killed before they were born; they do not exist; they had no chance to come into being—or might they be born, once the conditions of colonization cease to exist both in our minds and acts?

As the artist herself wrote: "Each of the pieces either symbolizes or represents emotional consequences of colonization. Their goal in terms of history is to show that point of view of the defeated; those who saw their cultures and societies disrupted by the imposition of another culture. . . . The sculptures embody a need for the cultural communication between the American past and the American present, and between the Western and non-Western cultures that cohabit this continent."[22] The combination of Velarde's disquieting rage and the religious setup of the work—an indigenous echo of the Christian trinity, in the presence of candles, flowers, and native woven textiles—can leave no one untouched. The voices that talk through her work are present and with us here today in the urban settings of the Americas, on television, in street protests, and they are the same voices that have existed for centuries. The political implications of her statement are clear for all: it is about liberation through creation.

By contrast, Rimer Cardillo's installation work evokes an atmosphere conducive to a quieter, more brooding contemplation. His works memorialize the effects of conquest and colonization. The absence of the human figure is emphasized by the used, eroded quality of the materials he

chooses. The wood, beams, boxes, and other constructions glow with the touch of life that occurs in the course of man's use—the way in which tools become indelibly engraved with a patina of life/history. The wounds and scars of time have increased the inner intensity and innate nobility of the material. There is steady awareness that these reliquaries, these memorials, these altars—the sand, dust, stones, and all of the materials—have been employed before but are here to recall our collective memories. They are muted and hieratic presences sitting in front of us, grave objects that are alive with history. Many of these works actually can be opened or closed, as though waiting in this dual intention to receive the missing component—that which is brought by a viewer in communion with it. The way in which the work opens and closes or is bolted calls to mind the idea of imprisonment—the imprisonment of early Christian heretics, the catacombs, the tombs where people were buried alive, the slave trade, the concentration camps, the torture cells of Cardillo's native Uruguay, and on a subliminal level, the boxed-away, repressed emotions and feelings of every human being. Or, perhaps it is our collective memory as native Americans that has been locked away? It is no coincidence that Amalia Mesa-Bains, the Chicana artist who was the curator of *Ceremony of Memory*, included Cardillo's unusual, non-narrative altars. His are the opposite of those created by Chicanos, Mexicans, or Caribbeans. Cardillo's are economical and subdued in color, while strong in scale, presence, and spiritual substance.

In "Silent Barrack," 1989, Cardillo has integrated a large-scale print on handmade paper made from wood, which evocatively looms like a genie or ghost/soul, or recalls the shape of a sacrificial lamb. This image is on a large, boxlike, framed, wood structure, pushed back by a metal rod, as though to keep it at bay, or upward to stop it from crashing down. In front sits a cast-iron sink mounted on dirt and sand, pierced diagonally by a wood shaft—an archaic weapon, for defense or for attack? Mesa-Bains comments that "in 'Silent Barrack' . . . the eerie image of an amorphous torso, the repetitious use of the wooden form and the seemingly random placement of the found object require us to draw relations and associations that are both disturbing and compelling."[23]

Having been an award-winning printmaker, Cardillo never abandor this medium; he transposes it onto a metaphorical level whereby "printing" is now anything that has left its trace and markings on the materials he chooses. Weathered naturally or assisted by the artist, Cardillo's worl map an imaginary South American landscape. He is close to the traditio of the late Latin American modern artist, Joaquín Torres-García, a fellov Uruguayan. The legacy of Torres-García as an artist, writer, and teacher seminal and continues to be felt in the work of many contemporary artis in the Americas. Torres-García said: "The artists too must take possessi of the land. We must therefore be artists of the Americas."[24] This statement produced a historically significant shift of ground, away from the earlier preferred European models. Art was to be connected with the continental Americas and change history, inverting the order of influence

The work of Miguel Angel Ríos reverberates with his land, the lanc of the Americas. A title such as "I Paint a Poem with Earth No. 1," 198 88, brings the viewer immediately to the specific environment of a place such as the Andes of the artist's childhood, or to the Oaxacan and other Mexican towns that maintain their popular art traditions and where Ríc also has worked for the past 15 years. In large and medium-sized wall reliefs, Ríos has charted his own brand of maps. These territorial charts are done with ovoid-shaped or small square ceramic tiles, weaving a gri that is finished in an amazingly rich variety of shapes, colors, and textur and is inscribed by fragments of his own writing or that of others. In "Untitled," 1988, the egg-shaped ceramics are marked with dots and lir that seem to represent a galactic map or an ancient lunar code system. Some are smooth and whole, others have holes in them whereby they appear to have come alive and are talking to us. Alternately they seem t be quiet, to contain a mystery waiting to be unraveled. The handmade quality and the tactility are suggestive, and in their fragility they project the strength of nature's most humble matter, the earth. Elizabeth Ferre

notes that "the individual ovoids with holes cut into them resemble whistles and flutes, thereby evoking the exuberant music of the Andes, which has long inspired the artist."[25]

Last year, Ríos began to work with cardboard, another fragile and modest material that in its nobility serves a multipurpose existence and is found anywhere in the world. While cardboard boxes are particularly associated with packaging and protecting contents, Rios has intelligently turned their function inside out—from holding and hiding interior surprises, to becoming the surface of content/information.

In the series "El juego y el dolor," 1992, ("The Game and the Pain"), Ríos addresses the Gulf War and the craziness of armed conflict as it became part of everyone's life during the first half of 1991. As the media and television projected the same images over and over, diffusing the actual images of war with those "approved for public viewing," everyone's private frustration echoed the devastating effects of this horrific event. The small-scale boxes that Ríos called "Souvenirs" have scattered, painted flags that are structured by way of the grid/cube cardboard fragments. These works are strongly contrasted with the customary souvenirs that are brought back from our journeys. This journey, which the whole world took, with or without actually going, has left everyone wounded. The flags that reappear in almost all of the Persian Gulf boxes are of those nations involved, and they refer to the patriotic symbols of each, small or large, weak or powerful—here reduced by Ríos to equal status, equal responsibility. He does not make any judgments or morally explicit statements but forges an emotional outcry at the destructive violence of military interventions.

In "Alien's Action," from the the series "El Juego y el dolor," Ríos juxtaposes the order and symmetry of the flag/grid/cube format with random smudges that resemble clouds, spots of oil, the smoke from the wells on fire or, perhaps, the blackness of bomb explosions, or all of the above. At times, the surfaces have been pierced as though hit by bullets; other times the outlines of the map of Kuwait or Iraq or the shadow of a profile seems to float and cover the grid. As Meyer Raphael Rubinstein observes: "On one level 'El juego y el dolor' is Ríos' revenge on Saddam and Bush for disrupting his life as an artist, as if to say, if this war is going to force its way into my life, then I might as well take the bull by the horns. On another level, it is a demonstration of the possibilities of recycling, a timely reminder that art doesn't always require sophisticated technology or expensive materials. More profoundly it throws into reverse the incessant flow of images and information that has already buried most people's consciousness of this war."[26]

Another artist from Argentina, Guillermo Kuitca, has created a vast body of works that incorporate city and house plans, road maps, and theatre sets. These do not represent a specific place but are more about the psychological drive and need to fill a void that comes with having lost one's past, whether collective or individual. It is akin to the condition of an immigrant who feels homelessness and loss. Initially Kuitca's paintings were sets of an untold drama. Chairs turned upside down, abandoned and isolated—these scenes recalled the chilling effects of the violation of home and family during the military rule in Argentina. Or, on a more universal level, they seemed to be stage sets for a play that either Kuitca's company Mar Dulce produced or one which was to be used by another theatre performance group. These images hover in the in-between world of real and fictional events.

In 1987, Kuitca began making house plans of a generic, four-room apartment—a modular unit that is part of a larger building complex. These came as a result of Kuitca's interest in *The Lost Languages of Cranes*, by David Leavitt. It is a story of a family of three that lives in an apartment/unit similar to that in Kuitca's plan, an urban dwelling that could be anywhere. The parents are obsessed with their place and the threat of losing it. Their son needs to create an existence outside of this place; he spends hours alone drawing maps of imaginary cities and suburbs. His search for identity—to become someone both within himself and outside of the family—in addition to his homosexuality, are all part of

the story. Charles Merewhether writes: "The beds, the rooms, the models of apartments, each are bound spaces, places of confinement and isolation, marked out space of the social in which life is reduced to quantifiable units and bound by four walls. With their bland matter-of-factness, Kuitca evokes a sense of the physical and psychological conditions of life regulated and subject to those in power. The paintings are the palimpsest of the real."[27] Most of Kuitca's work is monochromatic, with an overriding greyish tonality that suggests dull sheet metal surface. Their greyness also emphasizes the muted and deadening quiet of abandoned barracks and buildings. Who were the people that slept, dreamt, made love, and died on Kuitca's map beds? As though flying carpets, the surfaces of his painted mattresses reveal roads and city maps that can enable the protagonists to dream and fly off towards imaginary places. "Suburban Beautyrest," 1991, is another of these hypothetical space/places, anonymous, yet with street names in French that the viewer is invited to discover or dream with. As Lynn Zelevansky writes: "[The fact] that, in every map, plan, and set, Kuitca mimics symbolic representations of experience, only underscores the sadness. It is a sentiment with which one can readily identify. Political exile and social estrangements are norms of our era."[28]

Luis Camnitzer, who has lived and worked for 30 years in New York, came from Uruguay, where as a child of immigrant parents, he was well aware of the conditions of the immigrant. Later on he also understood the politics that drove many of his fellow Uruguayans into exile, and in New York he shared the condition of being an "outsider" on many levels. As a writer and teacher, he has examined and promoted an ethically and morally responsible role for the artist in society. His consistent aim has been to create communication with the audience. Language is the means by which Camnitzer hopes to visually empower the viewer to arrive at a new reading or comprehension of what traditionally has been taken for granted. In regard to making art, Camnitzer explains: "One thing was that esthetics was a by-product, the packaging, but not a departure point for art. I tried to ignore composition as such, to limit myself to certain propositions that could 'flexibilize' the viewer in such a way that the artist was an intermediary between reality and the consumer was eliminated—to reverse the consumer into creator, which I guess was a common idea at that time. So I began to use language to describe certain visual situations. It also was part of my rejection of expensive materials that added to a 'poor esthetic,' one that was less authoritarian."[29]

Beginning his career as a printmaker, Camnitzer found a conceptual base in the idea that his art might "reach a mass audience." From the politically contextual works of the late sixties came his works of the early seventies, when he abandoned explicitly political events as motivations for the work and engaged himself in the creation of mixed media boxes. In these he built up, with everyday objects, a diary or intimate encyclopedia of his concerns that was again inextricably connected to the enigmatic and suggestive captions. In "Image Constructed with Words Arranged in a Sequence to Form a Sentence," 1973, we see a brass plate which is placed inside a glass box. The inscription reads: "This is a sentence that forms an image that looks like a sentence." The simplest cutout of a suburban track house has a Spanish caption reading "Casa: Hogar" ("House: Home"). The contrast of the concept of a "house being a home" and the image of it, which is the antithesis of what one imagines when one thinks of "house: home" makes one rethink the value system involved. These pieces all make a "point of sharing authorship with the viewer, setting the stage for Camnitzer's return to political issues in the eighties."[30]

Apart from the political overtones of his work, Camnitzer always manages to include an acute sense for the absurd combinations of words and their possible meanings. He sees the ironic associations that derive from taking everyday objects out of their ordinary situations, and he twists their hidden messages into witty, eye-opening, perceptual experiences. Camnitzer also is a challenging political force on the forefront of building a critique of Latin American art. In his own words: "Our choice to become artists is a political decision, independent of the content of our work. Our definition of art, of what culture we are serving, of what audience we

are addressing, of what our work is to achieve, are all political decisions. Thus the issue is not our access to the mainstream, but the mainstream's access to us. Only put this way can the mainstream act as a resonance box for our activities without eviscerating us. Whether the mainstream comes to us or bypasses us is of secondary importance. Of primary concern is that we remain in the trade of building a culture and know as precisely as possible what and whose culture we are building."[31]

From the outset of his career in the early seventies, Carlos Zerpa has been drawn to explore and criticize the overwhelming effects of visual/devotional forms in his native Venezuela. The vast amount of religious and superstitious imagery is ever-present. It is found on the walls next to pictures of common criminals or next to the boxing match schedules, in window displays, and at the markets, in small or large altars, and at home and in highway road shrines. Zerpa irreverently manipulates this apparently excessive need for objects of devotion and superstition, and he commits a purposeful sacrilege as he destroys. The results emerge in an equally astonishing amount of formats: from his early video installations and performances, to collages, mail art, objects such as chairs or tables, display cases and boxes and, finally, paintings. Initially, he even used his body in a series of "rituals" and "events," as he called them.

In Zerpa's hands nothing remains safe, and, as Camnitzer and the Cuban critic Gerardo Mosquera have already elaborated elsewhere, a type of savage assimilation of mass culture—which in Latin America is also called kitsch—occurs. The images of a popularly-venerated national saint, Dr. José Gregorio Hernandez; the Virgin of Coromoto; María Lionza; Jesus' sacred heart—are all party to the total alienation of a people, and this is the subject of Zerpa's inquiry. Zerpa shows us what industry and progress have created in the Third World. Contrary to what many hoped for (the notion that people would have the opportunity to free themselves), what has evolved is an enormous industry that goes hand in hand with religion, subjecting people into idolizing and granting divine status to the objects that afford them a higher place within their consumer society.

Zerpa assails the visual diversity of these syncretic images—they are all dissected into a ferociously incisive cultural imagery. In "España," 1992, a box is crowned with the Spanish crown of those that sponsored the Conquest. Inside we see a small crucifixion flanked by two popular Spanish characters: the male bullfighter and female flamenco dancer—a new holy trinity. Their offspring is represented by the decapitated head of baby Jesus. Has his body been taken to the Americas along with the Conquistadores? And, what happened to the Virgin? We only see her pearls, sitting inside a colonial silver teaspoon sifter. The popular phrase "las perlas de la Virgen" tells us of our desire to attain and have her virginal purity. The glass marbles, *canicas* in Spanish, allude to an *España Canija* (a mestizo derogatory reference to Spain). At the same time, the Conquest of the indigenous to a great extent commenced with the exchange of glass beads for silver and gold. A small drawer at the bottom of the case displays a series of mutilated, fragmented, broken babies, engendered as a result of the brutal colonization. Befittingly, on either side of the box we observe a series of wood stamps with Oriental characters, perhaps suggesting that the original mission of finding a new route to the Orient was literally sidetracked, turning into a frontal attack on the Americas, here rendered in a frontispiece altar work.

Today, the Latin American artist working in the United States encounters an unexpected paradox: the hegemony of Western culture rapidly is becoming marginal, and Latin American and other so-called minority art has become of increasing interest to the mainstream. This is demonstrated to a large extent by the contextual circumstances of grant programs, multicultural access policies, and corporate sponsorship initiatives. Although some progress has been made in terms of the visibility of this art, it is feared that due to the fickle nature of U.S. consumerism, the novelty will wear off, relegating "minority" art once more to a few patrons and *iluminados*. And even though the artists represented in this exhibition are seen as Latin American artists only, without their counter-

parts from other countries, it is the aim of the exhibition to underscore the wide range of diversity in their work and foster a sense of global communication with the audience. Finally, what is significant is that exhibitions such as this one afford both the artist and the viewer an equal opportunity for exchange, where both sides come away with new responses that challenge old stereotypes. Through the presentation of powerful and compelling works of art which employ a variety of ideas, strategies, and media, *Uncommon Ground: 23 Latin American Artists* provides an ample platform for this purpose.

1. Some of the more controversial and widely discussed exhibitions were: *Art of the Fantastic, 1920-1987*, Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, traveling exhibition, 1987-88; *Hispanic Art in the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery, traveling exhibition, 1987-89; *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, traveling exhibition, 1990-92; *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the U.S., 1920-1970*, Bronx, New York: Bronx Museum for the Arts, traveling exhibition, 1987-1990; and exhibitions of individual artists such as: *Juan Sanchez: Rican/Structed Convictions*, New York: Exit Art, traveling exhibition, 1989-1992; *Luis Camnitzer: Retrospective Exhibition 1966-1990*, Bronx, New York: Lehman College Art Gallery, traveling exhibition, 1991-92; *Pepón Osorio: Con To Los Hierros*, New York: Museo del Barrio, 1991; *Ana Mendieta: Silhouettes*, New York: Galerie Lelong, 1991; *Catalina Parra in Retrospect*, Bronx, New York: Lehman College Art Gallery, 1992; *Liliana Porter: Fragments of a Journey*, Bronx, New York: Bronx Museum for the Arts, 1992; *1 + 1 + 1: The Work of Alfredo Jaar*, New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, traveling exhibition, 1992; *Regina Silveira: In Absentia*, Queens, New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1992; and many others.

2. Some of the most noted 1992 "encounter year" exhibitions were: *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1992; *Faces of Eternity*, New York: Americas Society, 1992; *Ceremony of Memory*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, traveling exhibition, 1992; *Cuba-USA: The First Generation*, Washington, D.C.: Fondo del Sol, traveling exhibition, 1991-92; *Corazón Sangrante/The Bleeding Heart*, Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, traveling exhibition, 1991-94; *Guamán Pomán de Ayala*, New York: Americas Society, 1992; *Art of the Americas: The Argentine Project*, New York: John Good Gallery, Fawbush Gallery, Amy Lipton Gallery collaborative project, 1991; *Dissimilar Identities*, New York: Scott Alan Gallery, 1991-92; *Five Centuries After the Collision: Five Contemporary Artists' Visions*, Brooklyn, New York: The Art Gallery at Brooklyn College, 1992; *The Enduring Thread*, Brooklyn, New York: The Rotunda Gallery, 1992; *Contemporary Images: Colombia*, Queens, New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1992; and many more.

3. In the Northeast, where the movement in favor of the name "Latino" instead of "Hispanic" has flourished, one of its leaders, Angel Falcón, president of New York City's Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, says that the debate between the two words has become a political issue. He says that Hispanics are people who want to assimilate into North American society, and that Latinos "represent a new generation of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and others who truly want to work together to defy the system. The word 'Latino,' even in English, received much attention during the presidential campaign of 1988, when candidate Jesse Jackson made it part of his vocabulary. Near the end of the campaign, it was significant to note that to the Democrats we were Latinos and to Republicans we were Hispanics." In this year of elections, it is clear that many more candidates, regardless of political affiliations, are referring to the community as "Latinos." One of the pioneers in this field is Dr. Rodolfo de la Garza, a political scientist and director of the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, and he has started a national movement against the use of the word "Hispanic." For more see *The Latino News*, April/May 1992.

4. In the United States, in the subject matter of art, a "radical shift from nature to culture" has occurred which has created substitutes for the natural. See Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 84.

5. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, translated by Ralph Mannheim, Bollingen Series, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972, pp. 300-311. I discussed this book in conversation with Ana Mendieta upon her visit to Malta (in particular, the chapter "Spiritual Transformation: The Woman as Mana Figure").

6. See Nestor García Canclini, *Arte popular y sociedad en América Latina*; México, D.F.: Grijalbo, 1977; and Juan Acha, *Arte y sociedad: Latinoamérica y el sistema de producción*, México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1979.

7. Regina Vater, quoted in Jacqueline Barnitz, *Latin American Artists in New York Since 1970*, Austin: University of Texas at Austin, Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, 1987, p. 19.

8. "There, where two young patriots were unmercifully murdered, two crosses were erected. There, where by murdering two young men, they thought they had murdered and silenced a people's conscience, two crosses are standing straight upward, as a reminder and warning that we are a dignified and sensible people. The crime at Maravilla will not be forgotten!"

9. Sandra Eleta, quoted in *Hecho en Latino América: segundo coloquio Latinoamericano de fotografía*, México, D.F.: Palacio de Bellas Artes, April-May 1981, p. 296.

10. In a 1981 issue of *Artes Visuales*, a group of artists and critics from both "here" and "there" focused on Chicano art, culture, and issues of identity. After working on the contents for two years, one thing was certain: Chicano art was "as undocumented as the undocumented"—there was almost no printed material in existence regarding the issue of Latino identity. See Carla Stellweg, "De como el arte Chicano es tan indocumentado como los indocumentados," in *Artes Visuales* 29, México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes and Museo de Arte Moderno, 1981, p. 23.

11. Lowery Stokes Sims, Wifredo Lam, and Roberto Matta, "Surrealism in the New World," in *In the Mind's Eye*, Terry Ann R. Neff, ed., New York: Abbeville Press, 1985.

12. Manuel Macarrulla, "Statement by the Artist," in *Macarrulla*, New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, January 1988, p. 1.

13. Ana Mendieta, "Statement by the Artist," in *Artes Visuales* 29 (1981), p. 69.

14. Giulio Blanc, "The Miami Generation," in *Cuba-USA: The First Generation*, Washington, D.C.: Fondo del Sol, 1991-92, p. 7.

15. Nathan Budoff, "Nereyda García-Ferraz," in *New Art Examiner*, June 1992, p. 52.

16. See Edward Sullivan, "Paths of Memory: Re-Assessments of the Past in Recent Art from Mexico and the Andean Countries," in *Myth and Magic in the Americas, The Eighties*, Monterrey, Mexico: MARCO, pp. CLXX-CLXXIX; and *New Moments in Mexican Art*, Parallel Project, Madrid, Mexico-New York: Turner Books, 1990, with essays by various authors.

17. Edward Sullivan, "Sanctus Circus: The Art of Alejandro Colunga," in *Arts Magazine*, February 1987, p. 72.

18. Octavio Paz, "Los hijos de la Malinche," in *El laberinto de la soledad*, Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950, pp. 67-69.

19. Jean Fisher, "The Savage Gift," in *America: Bride of the Sun 1492-1992*, Antwerp, Belgium: Museum voor Schone Kunsten, pp. 276-277. Fisher's essay discusses the Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham, who lives in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

20. Francesco Pellizzi, "On the Border: Julio Galán," in *Julio Galán*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, June-July 1990, p. 22.

21. From a taped interview with the artist in New York, November 1991.

22. Kukuli Velarde, "We, the Colonized Ones," project proposal, New York, 1991.

23. Amalia Mesa-Bains, "The Archaeological Aesthetic of Rimer Cardillo: Stratum, Element, and Process," in *Rimer Cardillo*, New York: INTAR Gallery, 1989, p. 4.

24. Joaquín Torres-García, "El Nuevo Arte de América," in *La Escuela del Sur*, Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, July-August 1991, p. 58.

25. Elizabeth Ferrer, "Miguel Angel Rios," in *ArtNexus*, January 1992, p. 198.

26. Meyer Raphael Rubinstein, "Repackaging the Gulf War: The 'El Juego y El Dolor' Series of Miguel Angel Rios," in *Miguel Angel Ríos*, México, D.F.: Galería de Arte Mexicano, January 1992, p. 9.

27. Charles Merewhether, "Between Time, Between Places: The Passage of Desire in the Paintings of Kuitca," in *Guillermo Kuitca*, Rome: Gian Enzo Sperone Gallery in collaboration with Annina Nosei, December 1990, n. pag.

28. Lynn Zelevansky, in *Guillermo Kuitca*, Projects 30, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, September-October 1991, brochure.

29. Luis Camnitzer, quoted in Carla Stellweg, "Magnet—New York," in *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the U.S. 1920-1970*, New York: Harry Abrams and Bronx Museum for the Arts, 1989, p. 300.

30. Jenifer P. Borum, "Luis Camnitzer," in *ArtForum*, Summer 1991, pp. 114-115.

31. Luis Camnitzer, "Access to the Mainstream," in *Luis Camnitzer: Retrospective Exhibition 1966-1990*," Bronx, New York: Lehman College Art Gallery, February-March 1991, p. 43.

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