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ART REVIEWS

Latino Art, and Beyond Category

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Mr. Rosa-Ortiz is by no means alone in approaching art as a kind of critical, materialized poetry. Fay Ray does so in cancerous-looking collages made from images of gems cut from magazines; and Alfonso Muñoz in a photograph of a dark-skinned doll armed with a tiny ax, and set like a vengeful imp in a forest of antique silverware.

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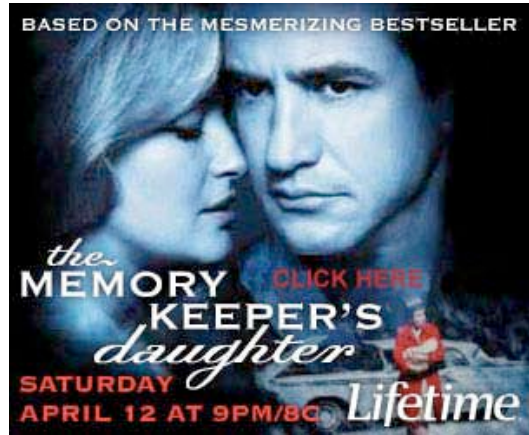
El Museo del Barrio

Muñoz's "Boy in a Mercury Forest," at El Museo del Barrio.

"The (S) Files/The Selected Files 2005" remains at El Museo del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Avenue, at 104th Street, East Harlem, (212)

Even didactic pieces deliver their messages with an eye to entertainment, as in Carlos Aponte's clever graphic coding of machismo, and Michael Paul Britto's "Ghetto Games," a video that turns an image of children playing on a found mattress into a slow-motion ballet. Carlos Motta catches the psychological manipulations of military training in an evocative merging of image and spoken text. Karina Aguilera Skvirsky, in her video "Blowback," uses horror movie scores to accompany a spectral army of global refugees marching through Central Park.

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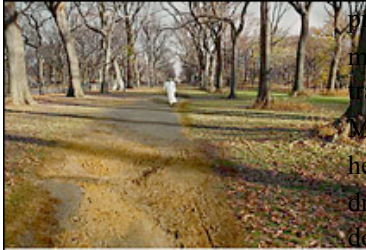
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831-7272, through Jan. 29. "AIM 25/Artist in the Marketplace" remains at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse, at 165th Street, Morrisania, (718) 681-6000, through Oct. 2.

Readers' Opinions

Forum: Artists and Exhibitions



El Museo del Barrio

Scenes of refugees in Central Park in "Blowback," a video by Karina Aguilera Skvirsky at El Museo del Barrio.

And a few artists subject old-school identity politics to an update. Jesús Negrón, known as Bubu, one of four Puerto Rican artists picked by Ms. Nieves, tackles the overworked theme of Latino spirituality by turning a religious pilgrimage into a bruising, barhopping binge. Ostensibly honoring a promise he made to his mother to quit drinking, he traveled from Puerto Rico to Mexico, penitently lugging her wheelchair with him and drinking all the way. He documents his via crucis with an archive of photographs, a video and a relic: the wheelchair itself.

In place of a huddled-masses view of immigration, Chio Flores offers, in a wall drawing, a wry, street-wise cartoon-strip account of her own move from Lima to New York just two days before the destruction of the World Trade Center. Another wall drawing, this one by the Bronx-based artist Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, rips into the very idea of ethnic identity, specifically the "Latina" identity that women like herself are pressured to adhere to.

Ms. Raimundi-Ortiz has more work on the same theme in "AIM 25" at the Bronx Museum. No art institution in the city has been more diversity-conscious than this one. And its Artist in the Marketplace program, a 12-week residency that focuses on the mechanics of career development and culminates in an exhibition, reflects this. While all of this year's 35 participants live in the United States, many were born elsewhere, including Brazil, Germany, India, Israel,

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Japan, Libya, Mexico, the Philippines and Croatia (the intriguing photographer Vlatka Horvat).

Comparisons between the two exhibitions are interesting. There is even less overt political work in the Bronx show than at El Museo. A text-based installation by Yucef Merhi and a group of drawings by Fawad Khan that includes a striking but enigmatic image of a blank-faced soldier, are pretty much it. At the same time, the shows have many points of formal overlap.

An assemblage sculpture by Brian Caverly, a cut-paper relief by Beth Gilfilen and a neon sculpture by Esperanza Mayobre, all at the Bronx Museum, have counterparts by José Enrique Krapp, Nicola López and Iliana Emilia Garcia at El Museo. All this work, in turn, finds ready correlatives in Chelsea galleries, raising the question of whether smaller museums are serving as alternatives to, or mirrors of, the mainstream. This is not to say that the Bronx show - organized by Lydia Yee, the museum's senior curator, and Amy Rosenblum Martin, assistant curator - is without distinctive entries. It has its share, in Ben Colebrook's painted sculptural re-creation of the self-help section of a Barnes & Noble bookstore; in Ernest Concepcion's absurdist mural drawing of universal war; in an installation by Olen Hsu that includes a full-scale paper piano.

And there are two noteworthy videos. One, by Ivan Monforte, shot with a digital camera, shifts lingeringly from house cats playing, to hip-hop dancers dancing, to shots of moths attracted to light. With its grainy color and spacey metabolism, it is strange and beautiful. Mr. Montforte is worth keeping an eye on.

So, maybe, is Steven Lam. His "Desperate Attempts in Making Something Out of Nothing: Toward an Illegitimate Practice" borrows from the wackiness of very early video art and adds slacker wackiness of its own. Unstylish style is part of the point. The only identity under scrutiny is Mr. Lam's as geek-anarchist artist. And the big idea, as suggested by the title, takes the form of another question, one that a lot of people have been asking in these postidentity, postpolitical days: beyond the flim-flam of passing trends, where does art go from here?

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