

Magnificent Masks

An Expressive, Well-Timed Exhibit Of An Ancient Art

By Ellen Schlesinger
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HALLOWEEN IS just around the corner and Galeria Posada is presenting an exhibition of masks by Chicano and American Indian artists. These fine examples of an ancient art form would be powerful at any time, but with Oct. 31 soon approaching, they act as reminders of the miraculous transformations possible through the use of line and

color. Masks are marvelous.

Being the same person, looking at the same face in the mirror every morning is not only predictable, it's boring. Although anthropologists might disagree, I'm convinced that the reason peoples of ancient cultures began to paint their faces (the forerunner of makeup) was to avoid seeing the same reflection every day. Perhaps as people became more imaginative, they began to make more drastic alterations, not only to their features but to their personalities as well. Why not impersonate a lion, a wolf or, for the truly audacious, a god?

In any case, masks of makeup, terra cotta or papier mache, whether they're from Egypt or a supermarket cheapo for Halloween, are

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magical because they disguise and transform their wearers. Just think of all the cute-as-a-button children who come trick-or-treating in their vampire and wicked witch get-ups. The clothes may be hokey, but the chalky white of their cheeks, the dreary gray circles under their eyes and the painted blood dripping from their ragged (store-bought) teeth change the neighborhood kids into believable baddies.

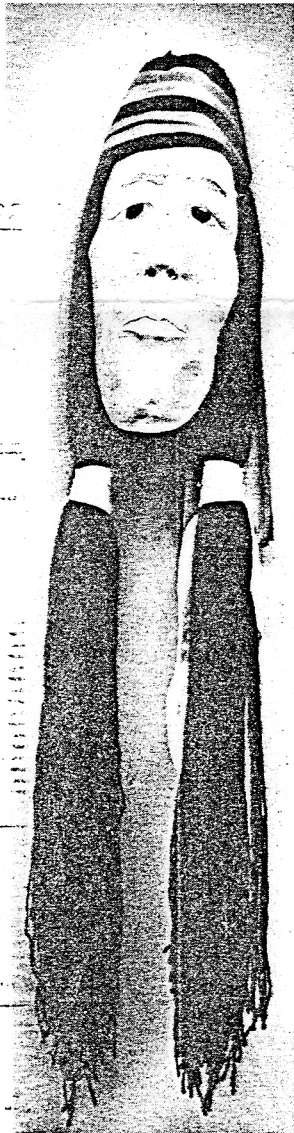
Through the ages, artists have used masks as a vehicle for expressing their thoughts on humanity. Just as it is easier for an individual wearing a hidden countenance to express strong emotion, it is also possible for artists to give fuller, freer reign to their feelings about life and death, humor and tragedy through the use of thinly veiled portraits: masks.

The masks included in "Mascaras: Personal Reflections" cover all emotional bases. Some border on caricature, others have the stylized simplicity associated with "primitive" art, while a few are close to straight portraiture.

With its cloth bandana, over-long drooping moustache and supercilious grin, "El Smiley" by Richard Rios is a humorous parody of a Chicano, a zany character who looks like he'd be right at home in a Cheech and Chong movie.

An untitled mixed-media mask by Javier Sandoval looks like something that might be worn at carnival or in a ritual dance. It's mystical and god-like. Its strong, handsome features are accentuated by the use of dark shadows. Wearing elaborately fashioned earrings and a headdress of fanned reeds, it is both dramatic and decorative.

"Animo" by Lorraine Garcia has the same melancholy, introspective quality as Odilon Redon's masterful painting from 1911, "Silence." The face of a beautiful, ethereal woman is partly concealed by folded and draped cheesecloth. Seen against its



"So Long, Beautiful," by George Blake



"El Smiley" by Richard Rios is among the masks currently on display at Galeria Posada. The exhibit comprises works from Chicano and American Indian artists.

white background, the face is a delicate vision. It's a knockout.

Scene

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