

Latin American Artists in the United States

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What is it that unites the art of Latin American artists living in the United States? Not very much. But this fact alone accounts for the great variety of work now in the Latino Art Museum's first Biennale. Though these artists share a cultural heritage which is itself already diverse, their lives in the United States have exposed them to one of the world's most complex and international art scenes. The result may be one of the few visible strands woven through this great assortment of art. For all these artists show an interest in combining the memory of their home cultures with the trends and innovations continually riddling the United States art scene of which they are now a part. Works of art varying in media from painting to the conceptual are therefore loosely strung together by this thin though significant link. Miguel Angel Guerrero Cosco's brilliantly painted *Mandarinas*, for example, resonates with the new interest in painting that has struck our country and more specifically, Los Angeles's art scene. Yet his near academic approach to the subject, in its thorough realism and studio site specificity, recalls practices of Mexico City's Academia San Carlos, the first traditional school of arts established in the Americas. Similarly, Maria Elena Bicer's *Quietud en el Jardin de Monet* reminds one of the strong link Argentina maintained with Europe's late 19th century avant-garde even as it shows her participation in a new photo-realism. Perhaps working the other way around, Carmen Diana Teal shows an interest in her country's historical treatment of indigenous populations while her art confronts the newest trends in conceptualism. Her installation *Guambia Penumbra* results from her residence with one of Colombia's most remote native populations but it mediates this encounter through a collection of physical terms that challenges a viewer to infer an overall meaning. As in other works of international exhibition art that one can find in Los Angeles galleries, what might otherwise be a random assortment of found materials suddenly seems significant as it is read through implied filters of South American cultures and histories. These same filters can lead one to ask if Perhaps Mauricio Vallejo's *La Pala* references Colombia's difficult task of excavating itself from so many layers of La Violencia, or if it nods toward the Neo-Concretism of Lygia Clark in neighboring Brazil? Or has he made Marcel Duchamp's New York ready-mades, from the late nineteen-teens, more topical to his home country's tortured history? Or does it achieve all these references in complex encounter with history and art?

These questions and others suggest another strand that could weave together this diverse collection of art. Could their unity arise in part through the context in which they are viewed? Modern and contemporary art have turned the act of viewer inference into a significant part of the art work itself and here, in the Latino Art Museum, that inference is heavily motivated by the show's context. Yet this too has become typical of North American and international exhibition art, where the show's environment plays a crucial role in the art's formation and reception. Engage with these works individually but ask yourself why they might be here together. What makes Beatriz Mejia-Krumbein's *Oda a la Mujer* unique as a near memorial to the women and child victims of war? How does it fit into the context of Latinas and Latinos working in the United States? Does it mediate questions about

Colombia's troubles alone or is it valid for larger histories of war? These questions ultimately allow an *entrada* into each exhibited piece, an entry that can engage the viewer with a series of questions, inferences and aesthetic positions that each artist offers through her or his work. The result of this encounter will be something like a collective work of art made between us in Pomona and these artists from various countries of Latin America.