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B-8 Downtown News

Chicano Artist's "Faces of the People" in New Space

Ramses Noriega at Galeria Nueva

by Rob Kendt

He's a big, broad man who makes subtle, lapidarian art. And that's only the first contradiction you'll notice about Ramses Noriega.

There's also his name.

"My parents are Christian, so they wanted to pick a name from the Bible," Noriega said of Ramses, the Old Testament pharaoh who dogged Moses. "They didn't know he was the bad guy!"

Noriega is no bad guy. Retaining his parents' Christian outlook, he's interested in uplifting and enjoying life.

Selling Chairs

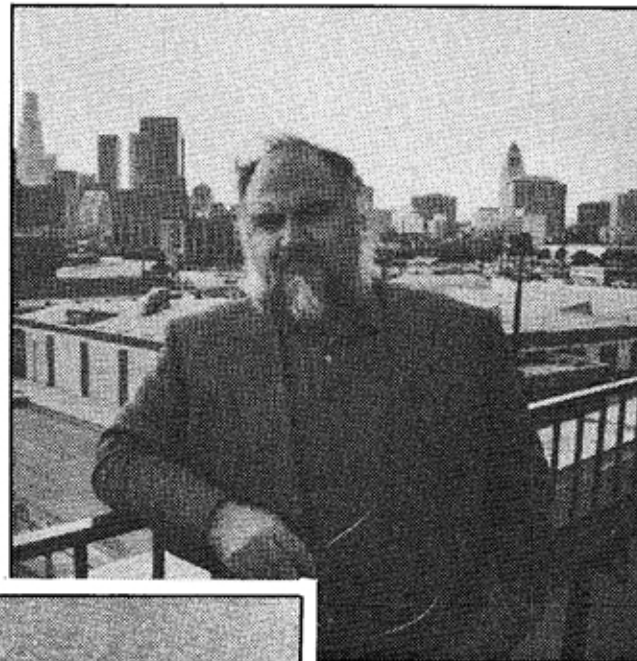
A new Downtown gallery—called, apropos, Galeria Nueva—where he opened his recent collection last week, reflects that outlook.

"Most galleries around don't know how to do the

like to spend some time with the people, get to know them."

While Noriega takes time to sniff roses, he touches thorns, too.

"I like to look at everything, see the balance," he said. "I like to mix joy with pain (in my art)."



Ramses Noriega in the loft district.

it's still beautiful. It's just more gentle. You don't have to always be hitting the high notes."

Arte Chicanista

The "La Gente" of the show's title may embrace all people, but "the" people Noriega especially represents in Galeria Nueva are an unsung majority of Chicanos and Latinos "sick and tired" of stereotypes, of "Chicano art" that pigeonholes itself in Hollywood and TV-news images of cholos and lowriders.

"Arte chicanista," Noriega calls it.

"The response to what we are doing here is so strong because we are showing the real Chicano art, which has a lot of European traditions."

Indeed, the art of Ismael Lorenzana and Linda Vallejo, two others who'll have solo shows at Galeria Nueva in the future, is heterogeneous and, like Noriega's, deserves a showing uncolored by ethnic categories.

What is recognizably "Chicano" about Lorenzana's captivating 3-D proscenia and sculpture, or Vallejo's multimedia found nature pieces? Nothing that's not "Anglo" about David Hockney's or Robert Longo's work.

In short, the "Chicano" in "Chicano art" refers to the artist; the "art" to the art.

"I think people take themselves too seriously," Noriega summed up without irony. "They should just be free to be themselves."

Galeria Nueva is at 912 E. 3rd St., Suite 402. Call for an appointment, (213) 613-1347. Noriega's show will be up through July 14.



Painting from Noriega's "Las Caras de la Gente" exhibition at the Galeria Nueva.

That catholic approach shows in his work, which forefronts faces as varied as his chosen media—oil, acrylic, ink and watercolor enunciate the many aspects layered into the expressions of people he knows and understands.

"I'm interested in faces," he said. His new show is entitled, with generality, "Las Caras de la Gente" ("The Faces of the People"). "And that's what most people look at, on TV and in magazines. They're like masks, people's expressions."

But don't tell him the of-

ten drained, muted hues of his paintings suggest "somber."

"That's a cultural thing," he said matter-of-factly. A former teacher for some 13 years at UCLA, Queens College and Berkeley, among other places, Noriega knows how to make his point.

"Colors aren't somber just because they're dark. Some of the darkest colors in nature are the most beautiful.

"It's like when you see a woman's face in the dark, or the half-light. You can barely make it out, but

"Colors aren't somber just because they're dark. Some of the darkest colors in nature are the most beautiful."

art business," he said, reclining on a sofa in Galeria Nueva's open, uncluttered space. "They sell art like they sell chairs. We