

ART BUSINESS NEWS

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Promoting The Artistic Spirit

Priscilla Vail Caldwell

In recent years, a number of liquor companies have launched "artful" advertising campaigns to promote their brands. For leading spirit marketers like Absolut and Stolichnaya, this has meant identifying artists who can best convey their product's image and entice an upscale, image conscious audience. When art meets commerce, advertising executives act as gallery directors, judging images from artists all over the world. Liquors like Seagram's Gin and Dewars are even turning

Continued on page 36

"Shout" by Khurshida Kamalova is an image that promotes Stolichnaya Vodka.

Latin American Artists Draw from Culture and Tradition for Inspiration

Laura Meyers

When Los Angeles-based artist Gloria Longval voyaged to Cuba for the third Biennial in 1989, the trip was not only an artistic event but a pilgrimage. For Longval, born to immigrants in an old Cuban "colonia" (settlement) in Tampa, Florida, the visit to Cuba was her first contact with her "natal earth."

Longval's deeply emotional and intellectual paintings are doorways into her past, evoking the memories of her grandmother and a spiritual connection to her heritage.

For Texas artist Nivia Gonzalez, Hispanic traditions and symbols also infuse her canvases. Gonzalez's narrative paintings are centered on a universal, archetypal woman who has a quiet strength. "Her work is very spiritual and very religious, and deeply connected to her past," observes Gonzalez's longtime Houston art dealer, Martha Meier, co-owner and director of the Jack Meier Gallery. "They're very meditative, and tell a simple story that is eloquent and very poetic."

Visually, the art works of Longval and Gonzalez couldn't be more different - Longval's dark, expressionist canvases are thick with paint and



"Black Bowl Offering from Evening Ponies," a mixed-media/copper leaf work by Nivia Gonzalez is offered by Jack Meier Gallery, Houston.

texture, while Gonzalez's works emphasize intense color hues, line and form. But they share a common thread that runs through the works of many Latin American and

Hispanic artists working in this country who are exiles, émigrés and expatriates from their homelands: a search for roots, an evocation of memories

Continued on page 32

12th Annual Framing Distributor Profiles

In our 1997 profiles of North American framing distributors, *Art Business News* presents data on 174 companies. To find a distributor of picture framing moulding, supplies and equipment to meet your needs, turn to pages 48 through 77.

Miami Reports Sunny Climate for the Arts

Ed Kassatly

Galleries, frameshops, and the art establishment of the greater Miami area appear to be benefitting from Miami's growing reputation as the southeast's most dynamic and most international city. Art businesses, institutions, and fine and commercial artists from Kendall and South Miami through Coral Gables to South Beach are keeping up a hot salsa pace with the growth of Dade

Continued on page 38

Romero Britto's colorful works dot Miami's landscape. "Doing Lunch" is published by Nan Miller Gallery.



Latin American Artists Draw from Culture and Tradition for Inspiration

continued from the front cover

both real and dreamed, narrative content, and an abiding spirituality.

Indeed, the phenomenon of the "Artist in Exile" characterizes much of the history of Latin American art. Throughout this century, Latin American artists left their notoriously unstable homelands for political, economic and cultural reasons. Today, the new Hispanic art being created in the U.S. by immigrant artists from Latin America and the Caribbean, and by artists of Latino ancestry who've been raised in California, Florida, New York, Chicago and Texas is both diverse and yet linked. It is alike and yet dissimilar, often dealing with issues of displacement, exile and of being outsiders in a dominant culture.

"Latin American artists are not interested in being 'ghettoized,'" says Miami art dealer Freddie Schnitzer. He's not alone in his opinion.

"Imagine if someone said Americans were all alike, that they share the same tastes, dressed alike and all looked alike. You'd say that's preposterous!" says Linda Vallejo, artist/owner of Galeria Las Americas, Santa Monica, Calif. "We have a language in common - but we have different cultures and backgrounds and religions. Even the mix of races in various parts of Latin America is diverse," she adds.

Yet, observes Charles Reinsch, owner, Galeria Coquí, Seattle, "It may be true of immigrant art, generally, that the artists are keeping alive the memories of where they came from."

One of the most prominent Latino artists in the Pacific Northwest is Alfredo Arreguín, who moved to Seattle from Michoacán at the age of 20, some 40 years ago. Today in his work are evocative faces and animals, and the theme of Madonnas as Mother Earth symbols, protectors of nature. Says Reinsch, "Alfredo keeps alive his memories of when his father sent him as a teenager into the jungles of Guerrero to toughen him up."



"LA landscape III" by Sara Palacios is offered by Galeria Las Americas.



"The Beginning" by Gloria Longval is an acrylic on canvas from the collection of Patrick and Fran Doherty.

"Art is usually autobiographical," points out Dora Valdes-Fauli, owner of The Americas Collection gallery in Coral Gables, Florida. For instance, one of The Americas Collection's artists, Demi, paints very sad-faced children. "You can certainly see the impact of her difficult childhood that was brought about by political forces," says Valdes-Fauli. "Demi's father was killed by Fidel Castro's forces in Cuba when she was a young child, and that set in motion a chain of events. She was sent to Puerto Rico without her mother to live and be raised by an aunt. Her life was very hard."

Valdes-Fauli adds that "many of these artists come [to the U.S.] with a concept that is Latin, a new place where they live is bound to influence them and their work sometimes changes as they live in this country."

The visual vocabularies of these artists with Latin American and Caribbean heritage often differ dramatically. Many paint with broad, gestural strokes and bright, colorful, tropical palettes, and populate their canvases with fantasy imagery. Consider the work of Miami-based Haitian exile artist Edouard Duval Carrié, whose work is exhibited throughout Latin America as well as this country. His work is saturated with color and peopled with spirited, often sardonic, island characters. Says his Los Angeles art dealer, Carine Fabius, owner of Galerie Lakaye, "His work is definitely informed by his homeland - as he says, the 'bizarre place' he comes from and the influences of the voodoo art."

Cecilia Miguez, a sculptor from Uruguay who now lives in Los Angeles, retains the colors, forms and feelings nurtured in Latin America. Her colorful figures of bronze, wood and found objects perform in a magical, imaginary circus.

But not all of these artists produce art with these expected colors and styles. For example, Enrique Martínez Celaya, a Cuban immigrant now living in Claremont, California, takes a quieter, more subdued approach in his artwork. His large canvases are often

adorned with dark, austere layers of paint, delicate birds and silk flowers, signifiers of labor, loss and memory. The artist says he has "discovered a propensity towards a restrained spirituality." It is said of his work that Martínez Celaya makes "poetic use of silences."

Claudia Bernardi is a San Francisco-based Argentinean printmaker who creates narrative frescoes on paper. "Claudia is also part of a forensic pathology team which exhumes mass graves in Central and South America. Her artwork is neither morbid nor gruesome, but these experiences do show up in her imagery," explains Reinsch of Galeria Coquí. "She crushes pigment and sprinkles it onto wet paper, and then she scratches images into it."

Photographer Maria Martínez-Canas' palette is essentially black and white. In her montages, she constructs fragments of memories of her Cuban



"Untitled," 1990, is an oil on canvas by Gustavo Ramos Rivera.

homeland, which are not really hers at all, since she left at the age of three months. "My memories were in reality my parents' memories," she writes.

Another artist with a subdued palette is Ernesto Pujol, who also hails from Cuba. Pujol notes that "memory may be encoded in objects," and that art is, in part, "the act of creating a symbolic language." In Pujol's "Winter" series, he paints flat, ordinary objects that are almost ghostly; images, he says, that haunt him during long, sleepless nights.

Dreams are a common theme for many of the artists. Sara Palacios, another Cuban exile, uses dreams as a tool. "Sara dreams her images before she paints them," says Vallejo, Galeria Las Americas. "Sara is basically self-educated, intensely intellectual and at the same time intensely spiritual. Where a highly-trained artist like Gloria Longval applies oil on oil on oil, a very European technique, Sara just hits the ground running, and lets her dreams and natural skills and instincts guide her."

"Sara's approach to creating is



"Tunkashila," 1995, is an acrylic on canvas by José Bedía, from a private collection, courtesy of Iturralde Gallery, Los Angeles.

pointedly diverse from Gloria's, though their work intersects well," observes Vallejo. "Gloria's paintings have deep intellectual, spiritual and emotional capacity." They also depict the symbols of Santería, the religion with African roots that was transmuted by Catholicism in Cuba. Longval's grandmother was a spiritualist and midwife who practiced the rituals of Afro-Cuban Santería. "Gloria has many fond and explicit memories of her grandmother," says Vallejo. Longval includes iconography such as sacrificial birds, imaginary animals with glowing eyes, black cats and women with masks.

As interesting as much of this work is, the marketplace for art produced by Latin American exiles, émigrés and expatriates is best described as "emerging." In the late 1980s, the market, especially at auction, for Latin American masters was seen as very undervalued. "Latin America was overlooked for a long, long time. It was the last frontier of affordable art," observes Miami art dealer Schnitzer. "Wilfredo Lam [the great Cuban Surrealist] in 1989 was available for \$150,000." But now, says Schnitzer, the marketplace for top Latin American pieces is in a transitional period, even as Miami and South Florida have become home to scores of galleries dealing in this work.

Gary Nader Fine Arts in Coral Gables conducts an annual auction and represents 170 artists in the gallery. "My auction is the masters and artists who are already known in this country," says Nader. "Ninety percent of my business is very strong pieces, very big artists. There are so many emerging artists that people just get confused." Nader's one exception: the Argentinean emigre Nicolas Leiva, who, "when he came to my gallery five years ago was completely unknown. He moved to Miami to become known."

Teresa Iturralde, co-owner of Iturralde Gallery, Los Angeles, handles both emerging artists and master works. "I will tell you, it's always easier to sell a \$100,000 [Rufino] Tamayo than an unknown, emerging artist for \$1,000," she says. "But we have come a long way since we started ten years ago. There's more scholarship, and more collectors. But still, a few years ago, when we did a show called 'Four

Continued on page 34

LATIN AMERICAN ARTISTS

continued from page 32

Cubans Today,' to our shock we learned it was the first show ever of Cuban artists on the West Coast. We had lines of people waiting to come into the gallery."

Florida has a thriving art scene, with an international base of collectors, according to Latino art specialist Glenn Engman, owner of Engman International in Coral Gables. Engman moved his gallery and art publishing firm to the Miami area from Los Angeles

three years ago. "Major galleries from Spain, Mexico and Latin America have opened here," he notes. He reasons that wealthy Latin American collectors often utilize Miami as a port of call on their way to another North American or European destination. At the same time, Miami is a siren song for America's and Canada's "snowbirds" who travel south to escape winter's cold. Says Engman: "I just sold two original paintings for \$35,000 to a pair of collectors on a long winter weekend from Pittsburgh."

Nader, who like many calls Miami "the Latin American art capital of the

world," has noted a distinct change in the collector base for these works. "When I started in this business, 95 percent of the buyers were Latin Americans. Now, at auction, mine and Sotheby's and Christie's, it is 30 percent Americans and Europeans."

"It's true," says Engman, Engman International, observing that 75 percent of his collectors are Anglo. "You don't have to speak Spanish or be of Latin origin to appreciate Latin American work. The best art transcends nationality, just as it transcends gender or religion, and stands on its own."

In fact, says Iturralde, Iturralde



"Tula" by Alfredo Arreguin, 1996, an oil on canvas, is offered by Galería Coquí.

Gallery, "the art market in Mexico has slowed down because of the economy. Historically, there are more art collectors per capita in Mexico than here, but the artists are trying to create more of an international market." Californians do collect the work of both expatriates and contemporary Latin American artists. But, not surprisingly, the California collectors tend to be stronger with Mexican artists, while "there are more collectors of Cuban and Central and South American art in Miami," she says. "What we do is very difficult, and it's taken a long time," acknowledges Iturralde, "but if you look at our invoice book now you will find that 90 percent of our collectors are Anglos; not just Anglos but 'I don't speak Spanish' Anglos."

In contrast, Vallejo, Galería Las Americas, concentrates on building collectors in the Latino community of Los Angeles - "people like me, Latins, Chicanos, housewives who've never bought art before and use a payment plan, that's who buys art with me."

In this artistic landscape, there haven't been many opportunities for these artists' works to reach mass audiences through commercial art publishing. One exception is Nivia Gonzalez, whose work has adorned book covers, and was published by Avon. Marco Fine Arts is releasing its third edition of her work in April.

The artist Orlando Agudelo has a strong market for originals and prints. "He is one of the success stories of immigrant artists," says Engman, Engman International, who has represented Agudelo, publishing 80 of his editions, in 17 years. "We do several million dollars [selling his work] every year."

Agudelo's imagery, he adds, "certainly draws on his Latin background and has some pre-Columbian imagery. His work deals with contemporary spirituality and his roots in Catholicism. He is like other Latins: culturally, their roots run deep." Says Engman, Agudelo's "imagery is distinct enough" to attract both collectors of Hispanic art and those who are drawn to contemporary artists without regard for genre or cultural/national background.

Agudelo's originals sell for \$20,000 to \$100,000, while his prints, in editions of 50 to 75, sell for \$3,500 to \$10,000. As well known as he is, "he still tends to sell in large cities, internationally, in Japan, in Mexico. He's strong on both Coasts, and Chicago."

But Agudelo, like most of his immigrant brethren, doesn't play all that well in Peoria.▲

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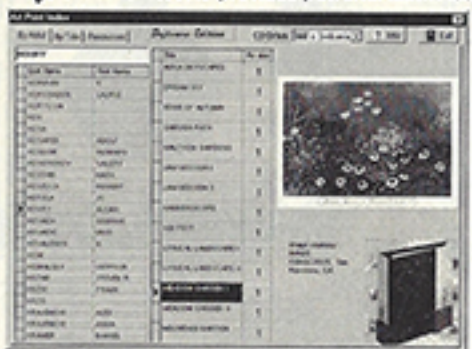
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