Denise -
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Artists exhibiting at the University of Southern California during the Olympic games share two things in common, they originate in Latin America and all are immigrants. To be from one of twenty countries of the most diverse characteristics and to be a resident in this country tells but a fraction about them. To be a recognized artist in any place requires much more than stamina. Most among the twenty-seven persons included come from Mexico, Cuba and Argentina. Central America, the Andean states and the Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) are represented. Among areas not seen are the powerful Colombian and Venezuelan schools, the Dominicans and Haitians among Caribbeans. Nonetheless an extraordinary spread of artistic commitments and processes appear in what is an important curatorial effort. It shows an extensive range of search and expression among artists of recent maturity and those familiar for their achievements.

All are burdened with making bridges between cultures and places. Some chose to make these changes. Several came at the behest of others. Perhaps theirs is the most difficult adjustment. Reasons for immigration may be as numerous as the persons involved.

If the current in-flow of persons from the Americas differs from earlier migration patterns, there are apparent reasons. Among these is the thought that one can be home, eventually. Travel is a jet-ride away. Many arrive for professional, technical, and economic opportunity. This in no way implies a rejection of the country and customs left behind in most instances.

All our homelands in this hemisphere share immigration patterns. Peoples from Europe, Asia and Africa have mixed with indigenous populations. Our mixtures vary yet all have felt the imprint of the European societies who implanted their customs on this continent. Historians tell us that Northern

Europeans arrived with different purposes and governance than did the Spanish and Portuguese to the south. Those differences still mark our value-systems, daily rhythms, hierarchies of importance, certainly our esthetic experiences, and probably our ways of estimating each other. Newcomers here must assess these differences and build individual traffic patterns between the precipices.

Aggressive North Americans, benefiting from a more-or-less benign assembly of resources and governance, from technological coherence and expanding economies have not always respected these inherited differences with neighbors to the south. Sometimes seen as an aggressive and colonializing culture the North American impact upon Latin American elites has been described as self-interested. Or, perhaps it does not invite alternates. European or North American art processes are occasionally given near "official" status when transposed to Latin American centers. The imperative virtues of these gifts are questioned. For example, a leading Venezuelan painter whose imagery seemed out of the main stream asked me, "What am I supposed to do? To re-paint the latest DeKooning show, or switch over to Francis Bacon?" He will do neither, but the question points to the anomalies of selecting the costumes of others with each time a different inhabitant. Quite naturally these imposed hierarchies produce resentment. It is a state of mind which can come here with the new resident, however impartial he chooses to be.

Add to indignation, difficulties of language, methods of commerce and hazards of survival and finally the complex ant-hill which is the American art world. It is not surprising that in time one may wish to return to one's roots. Through this way the main event, working as an artist, might replace the secondary battles of remaining afloat. Also one may bring back new experience to add to the totality at home. Perhaps not surprisingly this view comes upon artists who have fought the good battle for years and who have found

recognition here or in Europe. Then to go home and lead a new phalanx can be inviting. However, "home" itself has often changed. Related circumstances can include the existing national governmental views, stop and go signs in the corridors of authority (an acquaintance has moved from picket-line protest to official embrace as some sort of symbol, through a change of power and a successful period abroad). However the cards may fall, the possibility of return to a more benign setting requires a plane-ticket. It does not require the long sea-ride home of earlier immigration from Europe.

Meanwhile the "Latino" may hear his heritage attacked. A supercilious interest in Third World or so-called developing societies is sometimes expressed as evidence of congenital failure on the part of entire peoples. He ruefully recognizes that supporting choirs of applause for older European societies do not help his case and that cultural snobbisms explain little of substance.

Latins are not the first to face these dilemmas. Not so long ago there were American, Japanese and Lithuanians, attendants to the School of Paris. Before that Yankees appeared as "colonials" in the portrait painting salons of London or in nineteenth century Rome. They have shared similar road blocks with contemporary Ecuadorians and Bolivian artists seeking to make-it in the high-brow Buenos Aires of today. All must suffer the hazing accorded visitors to The Great Center.

Some artists have come from abroad to New York or other North American centers to "face the barricades,' or to test their talents in the multi-national arena. Some come to find the sources for those seductive color reproductions packaged in the art periodicals. Others may be encouraged, too, by the Latin critic who complains there is no one major world art center in all Latin America. In this case it is an Argentine authority speaking. Is his

a "colonialized mentality?" Perhaps his remark concerns what seems useful now: a conjunction of gallery-collector connections, mutual and constructive criticism among artists, respectable criticism in print, reasonably supported museums and exhibits of new developments from at home and abroad. Yet, these are rare enough anywhere.

An artist may well come here for the larger, now basically well-informed audiences and for exchange with like-minded peers. The audiences share a middle-class base of individuals at least partially relieved of survival pressures. They have time and energy to follow an artist's researches and weigh his conclusions. Such audiences are limited in small Latin countries, despite the often acute and widely experienced elite observers. In large nations to the south there are still vast differences in educational opportunities and cultural differences between the centers and the regions, as for example with the case of São Paulo and Caracas, as well as with Buenos Aires. To widen his market and his horizons a Latin American artist may choose a larger pool in which to fish, exactly as do his contemporaries in other fields.

Other stimuli to emigration include changing national governments with more exchange of portfolios than substance, and precarious, planned economies. In some cases repression and the suspension of personal rights prove alien to contemplation and research. These hurts are numbing, of course, when one is expatriated but they also often become a basis for artistic dissent.

Unfortunately the USA has not always welcomed all men as equal in the eyes of God, whatever our national policies. Newcomers find barriers here. They begin with money or the lack of it. Some newcomers are fortunate in friends and family. But communication blocks add to the walls surrounding education, gallery shows, publication, collector-interest and idea-exchange

with established artists. So to the road hazards already experienced by artists from regions of the United States and Canada are added matters of language and customs. Thus many visitors from abroad cluster in communities where the familiar languages, ideas, food and dragons of opposition surround them. Assimilation is not easy, frequently not desired. On the contrary success in scaling alien walls is dramatically shown by numbers of these exhibitors. They are recipients of prestigious grants, purchase and prize awards, often first from their home countries and later through Guggenheim fellowships, N.E.A. grants and like recognition. These grants applaud extra-ordinary effort. But lasting success is not automatic. One Guggenheim fellow in this exhibition has been here since 1960, but has never been included in the Whitney Museum's American Annuals, though his influence has been well-noted abroad, and he spend a half-year in his home city working with and helping young artists along.

In recognition of these assimilation problems many from the "new" cities of Latin America (new, in the sense of their enormous expansion since the 1950's) follow their father's custom of settling in European centers where language and cultural hurdles are lower and it is possible to find artist-peers in a nearby cafe or studio.

All influential personalities are not included in this exhibition, but what the curators have done importantly is to outline the extraordinary breadth of expression, age-groups and conceptual invention with which Latin artists are working in this country.

Too, Aqui seems carefully chosen to dissolve stereotypes. Among these bafflements is the apparent tropicalism presumed to distinguish all from the works of northern neighbors. The fact that this show looks quite like a care-fully selected "world-center" exhibition should surprise no one. Latin America

is a functional part of the modern world and shares in and contributes fundamentally to the formation of international tendencies. It is proved a false notion that Latins simply derive ideas from world centers, diluting these commodities with their own ways.

Nonetheless, there is a pronounced Latin American presence here. In finding a convenient verbal handle, for example "Latin American art," we find no such easy symbol. It is hard to define in a word or two all of anything of substance, and the risk is there of manipulating the essential meaning of what we see. What is apparent are complex and differentiated symbols made enroute to self-discovery. Perhaps "Art by Latin Americans" will have to do for now and several viewpoints will be suggested below. What is available are evidences of new and different mythologies (recent and old). They include individual rites of passage, of self definition and propitiation of commanding forces, and of nostalgia for paradise lost. There are tropical color and rhythms, but also the austere forms and cool environments of the high plateaus are a part of this entire milieu. Themes of protest are important in many locations. Symbols of repression, of the disappeared listed like commodities, can be presented with a scathing irony. Sometimes the moralities of historic Iberian laws appear side by side with ancient American mythologies, seen as talismanic reference to what is understood, seldom voiced. Perhaps some impulses extend from counter-reformation times, or possibly from Incaic practices into present cultural strata.

The spread of viewpoints shown here recalls the image of a fan in an artist's hand. The fan has eight ribs, but all are part of the same mechanism, a statement about one made by the self. The ribs, or directions are about: Realities of perception, outer and inner truths; Art drawn from art now or art history; Concern for sources in pre-Hispanic antiquities; Dissent;

Expressionism; related irrational, mythic and surreal statements; Conceptual art, process and performance, filmic and multi-medium forms; and painting as painting, though not necessarily art for art's sake.

The realities drawn by New Yorker Juan Gonzalez, born in Cuba and with college and graduate education in Miami, probe into the inner substance of people and things seen. Strength appears in delicacy. Figural elements, connected by tonal passages, appear in montage relationships expanding and contracting on a two dimensional surface. Arts which derive from art now and from well understood pictorial precedent appear in the works of several persons. The heavy and pastos figurative essays of Luis Frangella, a Guggenheim award winner from Buenos Aires, show work which has been intelligently studied and gone over many times to make the final results so apparentely direct and unforced.

Pre-Hispanic cultures of the Americas, with much still exhumed from humid or high altitutdes, carry with them a vocabulary of forms not paralleled elsewhere. Further, the esthetic edges are still sharp, unworn by excessive cliché. Where better to look for alternate routes for a fresh start? Only recently Mayan glyphs and graphic symbols been opened by scholarship. They are easily as vital to our curiosity as are those of Pompeii. Painting which explores symbolic and pictorial potentialities in Andean cultures, for instance such as those of César Paternosto of New York and Argentina, are not seen here. But what is well shown is the use of film bringing clarity and massive scale to monuments in the Peruvian highlands such as at Cuzco and Machu Pichu. Eduardo Calderón, who lives in Kirkland, Washington, is a Peruvian with American university training in anthropology and advanced study of museology. His photogrphy of Peruvian antiquities ofter surpasses the documentary.

A fourth category is dissent. Underlying much of current mail-art, graphic expression, figurative painting, performance and process work is the protest by independent minds against repression in its multiple forms. Among the most influential of these artists is an Uruguayan with extensive European and American research and teaching. He is Luis Camnitzer, living and teaching in the New York area. Long respected as an innovator, the 47-year-old Camnitzer has chosen the Idea as the fulcrum joining it with image-word juxtapositions in allusive, often grimly poetic terms. The principal actor in a graphic series here is the artist's hand, photographed in varying positions. Supporting roles are played by nails apparently driven through fingers, bottles, cattle-prods and such instruments as have caught the eyes of interrogators. The series which makes a number of conclusive points is titled, "Uruguayan Torture." Each stage of the inquiry is visualized separately and each is accompanied by a phrase which reveals the sadism and moloch-like purpose of breaking the owner of the hand. Photographic transfer processes give something of an "official" impersonality to these occasions, though the printing itself is immaculate.

Expressionism, central again since the late seventies has found three exceptionally strong contributors to this exhibition: Rafael Ferrer, Luis Cruz Azaceta and Carlos Loarca. Distinguishing this group from the polite and often eclectic Expressionism of the eighties has been a psychological intensity of commitment evident in the works of all three. One is not like another and yet they share the condition of auto-didact, each effectively self-tutored in finding the ways to make his points. Deeply felt experiences are often stated with irruptive force.

Rafael Ferrer, prominent in American art, began solo shows at age 33 (1966) and had his first Whiteny Museum exhibit in 1971. He has taught for

some years in Philadelphia and is celebrated as a sculptor, a maker of artifacts including decorated canoes and tents, and a painter of pictures. Before becoming a regular feature of one or more New York galleries, Ferrer was a drummer with salsa bands, perhaps coming to visual arts via music. He has imposed his own terms on the medium he uses and through them on the art world around him. His "Puerto Rican Sun" a monumental gateway is a sculptured entrance to a South Bronx ghetto. Perhaps no other so successfully transmits the color and rhythms of the Caribbean, nor the cross-cultural sources of a person apparently astride two worlds.

Luis Cruz Azaceta left Cuba at 18 with no intention of working as an artist. Yet he has become a painter of explosive impact and unqualified revelations. His paintings of the past decade, shows at Frumkin in New York and teaching at Berkeley establish him as one of the most powerful expressionist painters working in this country. For him, tasteful eclecticism is not even a question.

More slow in developing as an artist, but well worth the wait is Carlos Loarca, a Guatemalan living in San Francisco. His bachelor's degree in Queztaltenango was broadly based but not inclusive of the arts. Beyond some adult education classes in San Francisco and Philadelphia he has built his own technical skills and visual language. Both of these are devoted to the elaboration of legends and myths of Guatemalan origins. Most celebrated is a series devoted to a legendary dog-like creature, "El Cadejo" who accompanies late drinkers home from the neighborhood cantina. As companion "El Cadejo" offers guidance, unsolicited wisdom and rapport. In other cases the subject may be "El Brujo," a shamman-like figure who intercedes, predicts futures, controls atmospheric phenomena, and has much with which to help living and dead to get to know each other. He is the "divine" in us. The emphatic swirls

of Loarca's figuration make for expressive distortion and a grey-based, controlled palette offer a certain avenue into understanding aspects of our nature for which animism and animal-like equivalents are provided by the artist. His surely is an impressive, hard won series of revelations upon his life's passage.

Perhaps Surrealism really came home to Latin America with the appearance in Mexico during World War II of Andre Breton and other surrealist personalities. This surrealism was not the escapist variety attributed to polite salons, but reflected the seriousness of the joint statement issued by Breton and Trotsky, calling for eternal revolution. At any rate the resources for overturning rational systems already implied in mythic rite, the underlying patterns of supernatural forces, the national holidays based on pre-Christian ritual ("Day of the Dead," in Mexico) have long since become living parts of popular life. The Caribbean nations and sugar cane producing zones of tropical Latin America received West African peoples, their religions and Voodoo. Thus, Indian, African and late medieval Catholic religious practices join with indigenous mixtures, inextricably woven together. Immutable forces can be dealt with through going to mass, to a brujo, to a condomble, or a voodoo session, or perhaps several in succession, leaving nothing to chance.

It is to the reserved, silent mysteries that the secret-seeming painted and sculptured objects of Marcelo Bonevardi make allusion. An Argentine, long resident of New York, Bonevardi is a senior member of any hypothetical community of Latin American artists here. A Guggenheim winner, his importance, established with his works of the early 1960's, is based on a fusion of his own experiences in architecture sculpture and painting, has continued undiminished from his celebrated "Astrologer's Window" of 1964 (a massive wall piece) to his present sculptured constructions.

Beyond Bonevardi's pieces, there are the constructions of a younger, Cuban-born artist educated in Miami, Maria Christina Brito-Avellano. Her constructions, boxes, games, ceramics and furniture appear to carry messages. Perhaps they are images for her perception of the human condition and the isolation of those caught in social formulae. Her one-person shows begin with the 1980's, reveal a complex inner life of experiences raised in her works to metaphors of genuine elegance. The post-Duchampian world impinges here as in the Conceptual arts discussed later. Since the Documenta Exhibition at Kassel, Germany in 1972, further reanalysis of the visual arts was invited through the centrality of Duchamp's views as seen there.

Given the frights of a nuclear age and a general reassessment of human circumstances since the 1960's it is not surprising that the arts have revised themselves. At least five areas of inquiry are evident here: a) An expansion of psychic and literal space to free the environment for the arts. b) To press beyond historic uses of familiar mediums both in process and in their content potential. c) To find additional ways for self-revelation and thus for communion with others. d) To brush past established collector-and-display systems and to revive dulled receptors in the interest of awakened communications with others. In short, to re-vitalize communication. e) Finally, a transmission of central ideas as matrices for multi-mediums presentations.* (footnote) * (The great ideas we learn, with guidance from R. P. Blackmuir, lie in coherent systems of wisdom. Consequently, there is a further search of unfamiliar religious, systems of magic and ritual, and of sciences of the mind. Anthropologist Levi Straus reminded us that paintings are homologous to reality rather than being copies of reality. Unlike paintings, poetry does not structure images homologous to reality but introduces images into primary structures, linguistic ones.)

Our conceptual arts segment offers many alternatives. For example, Liliana Porter, an Argentine now in New York City, is a much applauded and award-winning graphic artist, painter and constructor of installations. She is making essays upon the surprising ambiguities available in stating basic realities. She begins with the real and believable. She concludes with the possible at the edge of improbability. A master-craftsman, she treats her versatility casually, noting that she might almost as well have been a writer, following family precedent.

Performance arts with the body used as a motor and expressive factor, photography (still or moving pictures), projections with light and sound evoke a wider space for the artist's expression. Here there are two Brazilians of distinction, Regina Vater and Marilia. Regina (who shares ethonocentric interests with the Cuba-born Ana Mendietta) has, as a graphic and plastic artist, an extensive exhibition and performance history in Brazil. Her personal development must include ground-work laid by the internationally influential Concretist and Neo-Concrete movements whose researches in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, began about 1952. The primary figures in this movement to re-structure pictures, symbols and words as signals are three, Augusto and Arnoldo De Campos and Decio Pignatari. They made important contributions to like movements in the Germanic countries and France, contacts mutually productive over thirty years. As communicator, artist and curator Regina brings unusual scope and understanding to this show.

Ana Mendietta ("caught between two cultures") was separated early from her native Cuba, educated here at the University of Iowa and elsewhere and thoroughly trained in the classical materials and techniques of art. She has broken through these to a highly personal way of working. Her photographic documentation of sculptured reliefs set in earth environments, suggest

neolithic forms in prehistoric settings. The general dimensions are said to be hers and themes of the female thorax are simply, strongly stated with now increasing simplicity in reliefs, and in drawings as well.

The Puerto Rican Papo Colo with dramatic performance demonstrations and Marilia, a Brazilian actress and linguist, use the body as an interpretive instrument in varied surroundings. For Papo Colo, the settings are urban. For Marilia it is the stage. Her symbolic intent is linked with the poetics of her husband, the celebrated Japanese poet, Gozo Yoshimasu and with musical improvisations and percussion. To their tripod of supporting audiences in the United States, Japan and Brazil they add European appearances. Japanese precedent may be the ally which helps them fill the interval between Bergson's two forms of memory, bodily function and the recollection of pure images.

Three exhibitors have centered upon linguistic arrangement, symbolic uses of word forms, graphic processes and popular communication. They are Leandro Katz, Alfredo Jaar and Armandina Lozano. Known for long as a poet and publisher, the Argentinian Katz is recognized for verbal constructions of volatile and allusive imagery. His Self Hipnosis, a freely woven syntactical statement of the mid-seventies recalls the comment of critic Ted Castle that "the ambiguous" has been Katz's field of action.

Afredo Jaar, among several impressive like-minded Chileans, has produced a formidable system of messages based on verbal symbols and installation pieces. He preceded them with architectural training in Santiago, the study of theater and cinematography. In his works one must face barriers. They define the authoritarian state. The idea is to find a place for one's self, if not in one's country at least on one's continent. Somewhere between the U.S. and the "us" third persons may locate their options, though through the act of making art the maker may be, literally, at risk.

On the other hand, Mexican born Carlos Almaraz has responded with notable facility to his Los Angeles environment. The 43-year-old painter and muralist has used excellent educational resources for collegiate and post-graduate study in studio arts and psychology, working both in Los Angeles and New York City. He now appears at home as a painterly-painter who works comfortably in large scale format, on the hot side of the palette and with figurative imagery to which his hand appears by nature to have direct contact. A singularly impressive solo exhibition last year at the Arco Center for Visual Arts showed his to be a differentiated pictorial sensibility with a long road of opportunities ahead. He has made an artistic space for himself, is critically acclaimed, serves his community's interests and seems to have succeeded in doing precisely what many artists-as-immigrant hope to do.

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