

KOPLIN DEL RIO

ARTIFEX

EINAR & JAMEX DE LA TORRE

HARRY GAMBOA JR.

SHIZU SALDAMANDO

JOHN VALADEZ

May 18 - June 29, 2013

Artist Reception: Saturday, May 18, 6-8pm



Panel Discussion: *Artifex: Art Effects Beyond Identity*

Wednesday, May 29, 7 - 8pm

Moderator: Cheech Marin, Entertainer
& Chicano Art Advocate

Panelists: Susana Smith Bautista,
Ph.D, Art Historian &
Chicano/Latino Arts Expert

And artists: Einar and Jamex de la Torre,
Harry Gamboa Jr., Shizu Saldamando
and John Valadez



Exhibition organized by: Daniel Saxon

Cheech Marin

Please RSVP as seating is limited

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition Dates: May 18 – June 29, 2013

Reception for the Artists: Saturday, May 18, 2013, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Panel Discussion: Wednesday, May 29, 7:00 – 8:00 pm

Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Friday: 10:00 am – 5:30 pm; Saturday: 11:00 am – 5:30 pm

Public Contact: 310-836-9055

ARTIFEX

New Work by Einar and Jamex de la Torre, Harry Gamboa Jr., Shizu Saldamando and John Valadez

By Susana Smith Bautista, Ph.D

Five Latino artists that come from different generations, geographic conditions and cultural influences, but all with one thing in common; a commitment to artistically explore cultural artifacts that signify identity. These artifacts can be anonymous remnants from second-hand stores, found and used by Einar and Jamex de la Torre, or more personal artifacts such as the clothing, jewelry, and tattoos on the figures drawn by Shizu Saldamando, or John Valadez's cautious use of Chicano artifacts like the low-rider car and the Virgin. Harry Gamboa Jr.'s characters in his photographs, films, and performances have become artifacts of a new Chicano culture that is being constantly (re)created through the organic evolution of Chicano artists themselves. These five artists both appropriate cultural artifacts and create new ones through their artistic vision that reflects their immersion in contemporary culture as well as their desire to contribute to the global visual discourse.

Notions of identity, culture, and community emerged in the 1960s and '70s during the civil rights movement with the Brown Berets and the Chicano Moratorium. Today in 2013 the world has changed. Artists are no less conscious of their identity, but that identity is a much larger assemblage of where they were born, where they have lived, where they exhibit, where they travel, and who they meet. To say that the de la Torre brothers are Mexican artists says nothing about their formative years in Orange County or their current experience of the U.S./Mexico border region that they cross regularly between their San Diego studio and their home in Ensenada. Younger artists like Saldamando don't approach identity as monolithic, but rather as a remix of pop culture, fine arts, west side, east side, Mexican, Asian, and more. Gamboa Jr. started to use his camera in the 1970s to document the urban Chicano experience in his subversive style, and continues to do so as that same experience changes, even as means of subversion and assumptions of normalcy change. Valadez created a cultural iconography drawn from his neglected world to empower Chicanos, but today that world is no longer confused and angry, and creates its own iconographies. Latino culture in the 21st century is about reflection, creation, and contribution of new ways of thinking, new ideas, and new media. The artists participate concurrently in a local and a global world, on a Latino and an American field, and in high and low cultural spaces. We cannot negate the continued presence of identity, social issues, ethnicity, history, and culture, but we can try to go beyond to focus on what really matters; the work as contemporary *arte factum*.

Einar and Jamex de la Torre are constantly pushing the boundaries of their knowledge and of what is acceptable or expected, exploring the potential of glass sculpture, painting, resin, digital printing, and collage. The layering of sculpture onto two-dimensional panels with wall-papered or lenticular imagery - as in *Spring is in the Air* and *DNA (Do Not Absolve)* - creates a rich theatricality that extends out into the space of the viewer and then pulls the viewer deep inside the work, swaying from side to side for the complete experience. Other new work is inspired by a recent trip to Belgium, idealizing Pieter Bruegel for his heroic portrayal of everyday peasant life in the 16th century and adopting the genre of still-life painting that allows the artists to incorporate contrasting elements. Their work is never a choice of elimination but one of accumulation in order to accommodate their rich well of influences, experiences and experiments; not a postmodern pastiche that is disconnected and isolated but a socio-cultural mash-up that obliges us to make connections, seek out familiar signifiers, and laugh irreverently.



Einar and Jamex de la Torre, *Spring is in the Air*, 2012, mixed media on panel, 32" x 48"

Harry Gamboa Jr. explores notions of stereotypes and media-produced perceptions of Chicanos in his ongoing *Chicano Male Unbonded* series from 1991. Prompted by watching *America's Most Wanted* television program, the artist began to wonder how people would perceive his Chicano male friends (scholars, lawyers, musicians, artists, teachers) when standing on urban street corners at night. In these male portraits, and the accompanying female ones from his *In Sense* series, the figures dominate the space regardless of the background. Rendered more powerful in black and white, they shout defiance, confidence, pride and fearlessness. Gamboa's photographic gaze intuitively directs their performance, much like he directs the video projects and performances that continue to represent an important and inspirational part of his artistic oeuvre, whether working with foreigners as he travels abroad or with local artists and friends in his troupe Virtual Vérité.





Harry Gamboa Jr., *Chicano Male Unbonded: Salomón Huerta, Artist*, 2008, gelatin silver print, ed.3/6, 14" x 11"

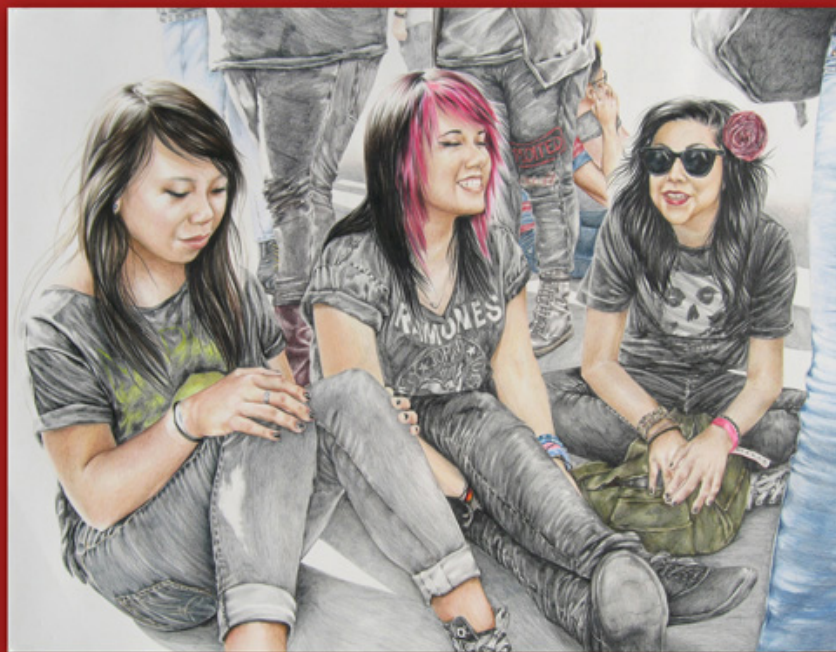
John Valadez's new work takes a stylistic turn into the satirical and surrealist, linking disparate images together in his signature realist and figurative style, but there is a distinct sense of humor in these works (*Bull Slipt*), albeit dark and subtle. Two characters are prominent in his recent works; the nude and the ocean. The nude provides tension and contrast when inserted into ordinary settings such as in *Lovers Lane* and *Streetfight*, and the ocean provides an intensity that brings out emotions as in *Ascension* that overindulges us with waves, clouds, and flames that all rage in harmony, pointing to the tall white nude that balances both precipitously and serenely atop the dark nude in the water. *Dark Clown Scandals* is nostalgic, as is *Streetfight* that was started in 1988 and finished in 2012, both referencing Valadez's Chicano culture from the past, but with greater stylistic and iconographic complexity that synthesizes past and present, sad and funny, fantasy and reality.



John Valadez, *Bull Slipt*, 2013, acrylic and oil on wood panel, 30" x 45"

Shizu Saldamando's work lies in the realm of figurative realism that pays homage to

John Valadez who documented his subaltern community. Saldamando's is a different community, also outside mainstream society but one that is multi-ethnic, sexually ambivalent, and partial to indie music, background parties, and tattoo parlors. She is inspired by her friends and draws them with honesty and tenderness. With *Rina and Carn* we feel as if we are intruding on a personal and emotional moment. The two figures are awkwardly squeezed together in the corner but our focus is drawn to the wide open eyes, causing us to ponder what they are thinking, where they are looking. In *In Between Sets, Waiting for the Band* the three female figures fill the canvas. Despite the uniform of grey denim and t-shirts and all their eyes closed or covered with glasses, their individuality comes through with a shock of pink hair, a pink flower, bracelet, or touch of green. Unlike the traditional reclining poses of Old Masters, the body in *Backyard Hardcore* turns away from the viewer to seek privacy, showing only traces of identity on the jacket that our gaze focuses on. The grey space envelops the body as if in a void, with the only references to reality a hanging hat, a few tufts of grass surrounding the body, and an open can in the corner.



Shizu Saldamando, *In Between Sets, Waiting for the Band*, 2010, color pencil on paper, 23" x 36"

By Susana Smith Bautista, Ph.D.

Susana Bautista is a scholar on museums and the arts, technology and digital culture, and Latino/Chicano art and culture. She received her Ph.D. in Communication as a Provost Fellow and her Masters degree in Art History/ Museum Studies, both at the University of Southern California. Susana has over 20 years of experience in the art world in Los Angeles, New York, and Greece working with museums, commercial galleries and non-profit art spaces, curating exhibitions, lecturing, and writing art criticism and articles. She was Executive Director of the Mexican Cultural Institute, Editorial Director of LatinArt.com, and Arts and Culture Commissioner for the city of Pasadena.

For further information or photos, please contact Ronald De Angelis at (310) 836-9055

