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Archives of American Art

Mel Casas papers: Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1988-1989

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THE ARTISTS

Rodolfo Abularach
New York (Guatemala)

Carlos Alfonzo
Miami (Cuba)

Maria Brito-Avellana
Miami (Cuba)

Amalia Mesa-Bains
San Francisco

Tony Bechara
New York (Puerto Rico)

Mario Bencomo
Miami (Cuba)

Humberto Calzada
Miami (Cuba)

Rimer Cardillo
New York (Uruguay)

Mel Casas
Texas

Enrique Castro-Cid
Miami (Chile)

Alfredo Ceibal
New York (Guatemala)

Perez Celis
New York (Argentina)

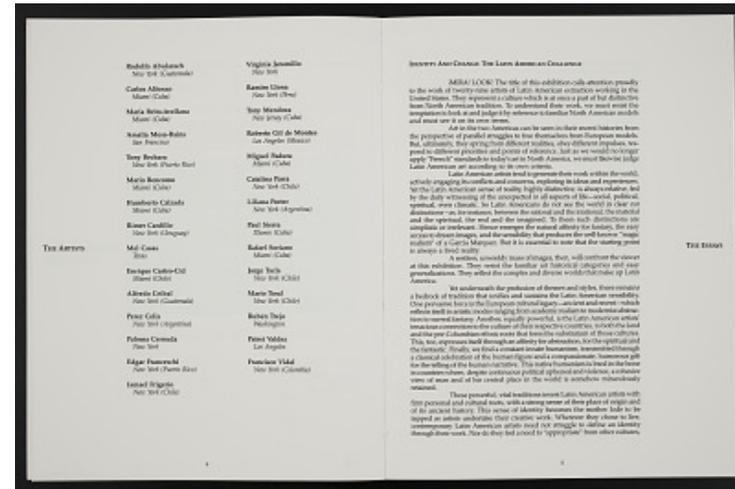
Paloma Cernuda
New York

Edgar Franceschi
New York (Puerto Rico)

Ismael Frigerio
New York (Chile)

Virginia Jaramillo
New York

Ramiro Llona
New York (Peru)



Tony Mendoza
New Jersey (Cuba)

Roberto Gil de Montes
Los Angeles (Mexico)

Miguel Padura
Miami (Cuba)

Catalina Parra
New York (Chile)

Liliana Porter
New York (Argentina)

Paul Sierra
Illinois (Cuba)

Rafael Soriano
Miami (Cuba)

Jorge Tacla
New York (Chile)

Mario Toral
New York (Chile)

Rubén Trejo
Washington

Patssi Valdez
Los Angeles

Francisco Vidal
New York (Colombia)

IDENTITY AND CHANGE: THE LATIN AMERICAN CHALLENGE

¡MIRA! LOOK! The title of this exhibition calls attention proudly to the work of twenty-nine artists of Latin American extraction working in the United States. They represent a culture which is at once a part of but distinctive from North American tradition. To understand their work, we must resist the temptation to look at and judge it by reference to familiar North American models and must see it on its own terms.

Art in the two Americas can be seen in their recent histories from the perspective of the parallel struggles to free themselves from European models. But, ultimately, they spring from different realities, obey different impulses, respond to different priorities and points of reference. Just as we would no longer apply "French" standards to today's art in North America, we must likewise judge Latin American art according to its own criteria.

Latin American artists tend to generate their work within the world, actively engaging in its conflicts and concerns, exploring its ideas and experiences. Yet the Latin American sense of reality, highly distinctive, is always relative, fed by the daily witnessing of the unexpected in all aspects of life-social, political, spiritual, even climactic. So Latin American do not see the world in clear cut distinctions—as, for instance, between the rational and the irrational, the material and spiritual, the real and the imagined. To the, such distractions are simplistic or irrelevant. Hence emerges the natural affinity for fantasy, the easy access to dream images, and the sensibility that produces the well-known "magic realism" of a Garcia Marquez. But it is essential to note that the starting point is always a lived reality.

A restless, unwieldy mass of images, then, will confront the viewer at this exhibition. They resist the familiar art historical categories and easy generalizations. They reflect the complex and diverse worlds that make up Latin America.

Yet underneath the profusion of themes and styles, there remains a bedrock of tradition that unifies and sustains the Latin American sensibility. One pervasive force is the European cultural legacy—ancient and recent—which reflects itself in artistic modes ranging from academic realism to modernist abstraction to surreal fantasy. Another, equally powerful, is the Latin American artists' tenacious connection to the culture of their respective countries, to both the land and the pre-Columbian ethnic roots that form the substratum of those cultures. This, too, expresses itself through an affinity for abstraction, for the spiritual and the fantastic. Finally, we find a constant innate humanism, transmitted through a classical celebration of the human figure and a compassionate, humorous gift for the telling of the human narrative. This native humanism is bred in the bone in countries where, despite continuous political upheaval and violence, a cohesive view of man and of his central place in the world is somehow miraculously retained.

These powerful, vital traditions invest Latin American artists with firm personal and cultural roots, with a strong sense of their place of origin and of its ancient history. This sense of identity becomes the mother lode to be tapped as artists undertake their creative work. Wherever they chose to live, contemporary Latin American artists need not struggle to define an identity through their work. No do they feel a need to "appropriate" from other cultures,

THE ESSAYS

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