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Archives of American Art

Celebrating 175: Mel Casas, Clippings, 1980-1987

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[[column 1]]

believe I will ever do it. In terms of black and white, I used to photograph weeds in the snow and telephone wires against the sky, but once again I don't think I would want to do that anymore. Something like that - it's real strange - gets to be a formula after a while. I think one of the great beauties in life is to be surprised. SO that is why it is impossible to sit around and wonder what you are going to do because you are not doing it.

On some of my trips I have taken a very small camera. I really don't like it for serious work, but once in a while you take something that even though it doesn't come out well gives you a clue to what you might be doing next. It might be something like that before and it worked. You remember deep inside that you hadn't carried it far enough or long enough.

Does all this talk about the permanence of color prints and the problems of color prints fading ever bother you?

Yes, it did, but I don't give a damn now. No, the idea of permanence doesn't mean as much to me now. Maybe it is because of my age. You an I can't go into the caves anymore because we just make the paintings fade by breathing on them. The horses in St. Mark's Square were taken down because they were rotting down from the pollution. Paintings are restored all of the time so they are probably nothing like they actually were in the beginning.

So I don't think we should hold permanence against color photography. The main thing, I think, is getting used to looking at color. It requires a taste and ability. I don't mean color in terms of painting but photographic color. So, all right, the print will last 50 years; well, how long to do you want the damn thing to last?

I think the people who are producing materials and the people who are working with them should want them to be more permanent. But I don't think that should hold people back from

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using them.

Do you think that someday color photography will surpass black and white in terms of popularity?

Yes, I would think so. This is something I have learned in living as long as I have. There are a lot of things that fade in a short period of time. I think classical music is a good example. There were the really fine instruments, like the Stradivarius violin, and a group of people that composed music that fit the instruments beautifully. They had their period and I think it is dead now. And I kind of think black and white will take the same course. It has been done by really fine artists back to Stieglitz, Steichen, and Atget. Those people used their materials beautifully.

This is just the way I've got it figured out myself. I'm not trying to say this for somebody else. Black and white photography may just keep right on going for the next hundred years. I have no idea... but a hundred years isn't really that much time anymore, is it?

The San Antonio Art Community
interview with Mel Casas and Alvin Martin

by Myron Brody

On a recent trip to San Antonio, Myron Brody spoke with Mel Casas, chairman of the Art Department of San Antonio Community College, and Alvin Martin, assistant professor (Art History and Drawing) at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Excerpts from their conversation are printed below.

First, I would like to know about the community here, and somewhat about the artists and art. For one thing, are artists organized? Is there a coalition, or is there a body that represents the artists

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First, I would like to know about the community here, and somewhat about the artists and art. For one thing, are artists organized? Is there a coalition, or is there a body that represents the artists

in the community?

AM: There is a coalition. I am not a member of it. Aren't you a member of it?

AM: I was. I am not very active in it, but there is a coalition, and there have been trying very hard for the last couple of years to effect some kind of continuity or some kind of membership. I don't know how successful they have been. I think it has had some success, some failure, but it is still partly embryonic.

They are active in Kansas City if they want to deal with the things not in the

AM: I think they know a lot of them.

We try to make it highly professional, but that has been our main goal. As an artist, professionally when I have a great number of Sunday painters, but we serve the whole community and it always is a struggle to people of that type. What kind of museum will you have here? Is the museum responsive in any way to dealing with the artists in the region?

AM: That we support a coalition implies indirectly dissatisfaction with the status quo in the community. Obviously, just trying to make that more explicit means that the problem must really be severe. In this case, I don't know much, but the artists don't really have that much representation in the local museum.

How does that relate to commercial galleries? What kind of commercial galleries?

AM: That's the primary problem. There is quite a lot of talent in San Antonio, good artists here, but there are relatively few good galleries, possibly two, maybe three, and of course severely few galleries, but most of the seventy-five galleries are essentially "black" galleries. You know, blueprints and copycats and that sort of thing. An artistic decision as to what to show. So I think that creates a lot of frustration, and there has been a lot of

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to the community?

MC: There is a coalition. I am not a member of it. Aren't you a member of it?

AM: I was. I am not very active in it, but there is a coalition; and they have been trying very hard for the last couple of years to effect some kind of community or some kind of interaction. I don't know how successful they have been. I think it has had some success, some failure, but it is still pretty embryonic.

They can come to Kansas City if they want to find out all the things not to do.

AM: I think they know a lot of them.

We try to make it highly professional, but that has been our weak point - to attract professionals when basically we have a great number of Sunday painters. But, we serve the whole community and in doing so it brings in people of that type. What kind of museum set-up do you have here? Is the museum responsive in any way to dealing with the artists in the region?

MC: That we support a coalition implies indirectly dissatisfaction with the status quo in the community. Obviously, just trying to unite that many egos means that the problem must really be severe. In this case, I don't know much, but the artists don't really have that much presence in the local museums.

How does that relate to commercial galleries? What kind of commercial galleries?

AM: That's the problem that I have been observing, the talent in San Antonio, good artists here, but there are relatively few good galleries, possibly two, maybe three, out of maybe seventy-five galleries, but most of the seventy-five galleries are essentially "schlock" galleries. You know, bluebonnets and cowboys and that sort of thing. An interior decoration sort of nature. SO I think that creates a lot of frustration, and there has been a lot of

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