

Neighborhood Art Exhibits Not to Miss

By Anthony L. Harvey

"Espejos" ("Mirrors") on view at the Mexican Cultural Institute, 2829-16th St.; tel., 728-1628; embassyofmexico.org

Contemporary visual artists who wish to expand the current universe of vibrant and colorful aesthetic expression – in transformative ways uniquely expressing their own respective artistic personalities – have found an ardent champion and impresario of rare industry and verve in Mexico City's Santiago Espinosa de los Monteros. And Espinosa's most recent curatorial triumph is now on display at the Mexican Cultural Institute until the middle of next month.

Titled "Mirrors: Contemporary Mexican Artists in the United States," the exhibition features the work of 36 artists who create their art while living outside the present political boundaries of Mexico – in American cities ranging from Austin, Texas to Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

These artists paint, sculpt, draw, take photographs, and create videos and installations of exuberantly engaging and beautifully crafted 21st century art that will challenge all who view the exhibition, resounding as it does with the universal themes of identify, estrangement, and aesthetic reconciliation – or at least tentative resolution through artistic form and new, startling content.

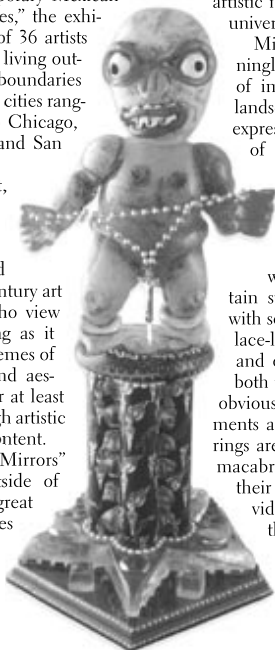
That the artists in "Mirrors" are Mexicans living outside of Mexico in the land of the great "other" – the United States – only adds yet another layer or level to the narrative and emotional meanings and impacts of these artists' works. And fortunately for the individual strengths of these works, all of the Institute's handsome and roomy first and fourth floor galleries are used for their display.

Visual delights immediately engage the viewer, beginning with Marcos Ramirez ERRES' grand mahogany Presidential Bed (2000) with an open bed-spring of raised nails patterned in an outline of the geography of Mexico and its North American surround. The bed's rich carvings include an

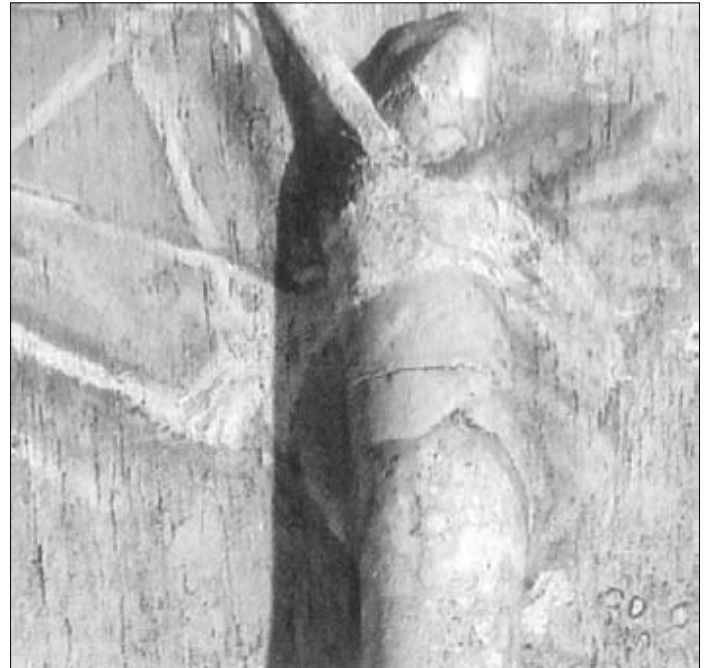
heretical Mexican eagle perched on a cactus with a snake in its beak – the traditional iconic image – with another snake attacking the eagle. Ears of corn crowned with Christian crosses lead a pantheon of syncretic symbology from both European and Mexican religions and their many predecessors. The viewer is thus launched from the Promethean bed of Procrustian nails onto an artistic journey through 100 art works informed by 36 sets of intensely interiorized artistic mirrors densely carapaced by universes of meanings.

Miguel Osuna's large and stunningly atmospheric oil paintings of imaginary and ghostly urban landscapes propel one as on an expressway through the first series of galleries where progression is pulled up short by the sounds of bleating lambs and fluttering butterflies – my candidates for two of the most ingenious art works in the show. Both contain still photographs and videos with sound and both present necklace-like circles, one of butterflies and one of lambs. In the videos both the lambs and butterflies are obviously feeding, and their movements around their circular feeding rings are both beautiful and slightly macabre. The interplay between their respective sets of stills and videos are also fascinating, as is that between the shorn lambs and static butterflies in the two photographs.

An entirely different kind of work is Mariana Botey's 1998 video, *The Thimble of the Roses*, shot in aggressively vivid Kodak Super 8 film. A 13-minute video organized around a floating garden where one is visually lead by a tall, powerfully built head-dressed man on a raft – interspersed with violent images and text ranging from Aztec poems to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, her video means many mesmerizing things, including – no doubt – innocence, identify, loss, and last things.



Einary James de la Torre, *El Luchadorcito/ The Little Wrestler* (2004).




Alfonso Mena Pacheco, *Grama* (2005).

Providing a light and devastating counterpoint to this (and other complex works) are the illustrations by FEGGO – Felipe Galindo's cartoon-like presentations from 1999 of Subcommandante Marcos' face on a balloon flying in one of the Macy's Day parades, two Mexican eagle warriors attacking one of the New York Public Library lions, and the Statue of Liberty recast as an Jose Posada-like skeletal angel of death. Radically different are Alfonso Mena Pacheco's nearby abstractions which

display moving representational contents, titled *Grama* (2005)

Wonderful works on display in the Institute's fourth floor galleries range from Sam Coronado's small depictions of *Guerrilla Girl-Lipstick* (2001) and her lipstick in labia-like aureoles to Ray Smith's grandiose send-up, in both paintings and sculptures, of surrealism's exquisite corpses (2005) – you'll love them, as well as much more in this grand show, happily ensconced through mid-November. □



ARCHITECTURAL

4chairsdesign, llc
michael k. wilkinson
photographs

portraits, events, weddings and commitment
ceremonies in the photojournalistic style

fine arts photographs

202.332.mkw1 (6591)
www.4chairsdesign.com

a clean house
a clean mind

a cleaning service, inc.

satisfaction guaranteed

since 1985

services provided in DC, VA and MD
commercial and residential
licensed, bonded, insured
free estimates

703.892.8648
www.acleaningserviceinc.com