

Art in Focus

American Dream

By Alfredo Triff

Dreams are dreams," says an old Spanish proverb; its message so matter-of-fact as to depict the mind's eye as useless. Then our 20th century came along and we all felt we had to dream a different world to make ours a little better. For many, America became a hope. More than a name, a concept, an emblem, a piece of land, the promise of a better future or a life-style, the American dream happens differently to different people. If so, this show means more than what we plainly see in these works. The art reflects a moment in these artists' lives—which is related to a place where dreams happen. The geography is irrelevant, because one can always dream about a place one has never been to.

On the other hand, many people live exiled from their own land, a kind of self-exile, which takes place in that "America of our dreams." Turn that metaphor on its head and this show makes more sense. After all, producing art is like working with dreams. And though these days it seems a bit optimistic to take America for a dream, some of these images are anything but optimistic. It's in that sense of ambivalence that dreams really happen, and it is to that idea of America that these artists' aspirations travel.

Julio Antonio's art blends primitive totem-like figuration with visceral political cartooning. One finds anecdotal tableaux—as if the works were illustrated stories of the artist and his time. Infused with male ennui, sin, and nostalgic guilt, Antonio's images reflect social and political views in a way that relates to a generally pervasive and unending Latin-American political affliction, ours.

As Carlos Betancourt, Da Vinci wrote backwards, but he didn't have the color of the Caribbean to play with. Betancourt's color saturates everything (as if nature was not enough). See his symbols and text on human bodies; the writing over the faces, hands, arms and abdomens. A lost language, when family and religion coalesced in a better world, a noble aim of transforming human identity through images of ecstasy and sacrifice.

Some hate anything modern. Pedro Vizcaino takes us into a gentler side of the modern world where airplanes, and taxis and trains come to life. These anthropomorphic machines

speak a language alien to our day and age. A bit Expressionist, a bit scribbling, a bit cartoon, they resemble crazy artifacts longing to make friends with us. This is not the sugar gloss or plain stupid we find so often in today's pop references. Vizcaino's images are bittersweet. In his hands man-made machines exhibit an odd and forgiving innocence.



Carlos Luna. Si cubano caliente caliente
Acrylic and carbon / amate paper,
150 x 240 cm / 59 x 94 in., 2003

Have you seen an art that happens frantically, where honesty means more than protocol? Sergio García's paintings are self-destructive to the point where some of the canvases have literally been slashed and stitched back together. See conflicting moments of humanity, brought forth with a sense of urgency, brutality, and carelessness. Enjoy García's nervous scribbling untroubled by color scheme. Dark in mood but truer to its essence, I find his delicate penmanship conveys subtler human marks. Mix the horse, roosters, bulls, a bit of Miro's Cubism, the Cuban guajiro and you get Carlos Luna. His images have a Baroque quality that turns life in the Cuban countryside into poetry. See jealousy and romance, the ups and downs of life amidst the occasional idle pondering under the shade of a big tree while smoking a cigar. Luna's art is like music, with clave and son montuno. A romantic who longs for a truer

essence of the country, but more so, this is art about life itself.

Isn't threading a sort of human technology? Silvia Gai is an expert at producing embroidered volumes that defy definition. By reviving forgotten practices, Gai's art goes against the grain. Who would, after the Industrial Revolution, indulge in wasting time? It pays to get the pleasure of seeing soft, delicate cell forms and tissues. Or else, abnormal growths or webs... the idea of insect life capturing before killing and feeding.

Carlos García's paintings are metaphysical and expressionist. It is a rare mix that he achieves because he paints abstraction to bring back the concrete. García is a sort of Caribbean Rothko—with a similar pain and the courage to show it with modesty. And behind his emotional monochromatic expanse of color we find sparse meaningful traces: García's signs, too personal a signature; like the vestige of gone but indelible human presence.

More than anything, Colombian Federico Uribe loves to trick our vision. What to expect from an artist who builds an artificial garden made up with shovels? Uribe can create the expressive qualities of a Van Gogh with color pencils standing up, glued to the canvas. In a way, his pieces are also sculptures. More so, they are bric-a-brac taken from other utensils, particularly his torsos, invested with the imperative of social norms. It is here that Uribe touches our Latin American chauvinism with wit and irony.

Whether realizing a foodstuff project, being Mirror Box Man, acting as performer, sculptor, impossible architect, or assembling a weird cabinet of curiosities Ferrán Martín is a trickster who mixes anything anytime under his criteria of controlled absurdity, which yields important discoveries we all partake in with a bit of amusement—though he gets the last laugh. Martín goes on finding and regaining truths and candor for all of us. ♦

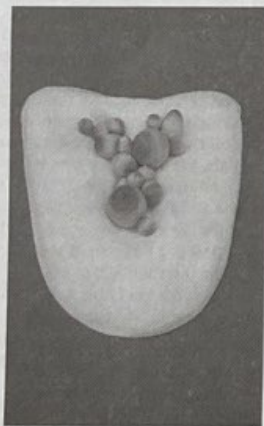
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Ephemeral/Trends II

at Merrill Lynch Arteamericas 04

By Milagros Bello, Ph.D.
Curator of Ephemeral/Trends II

Ephemeral/Trends II is a cutting edge exhibit presented at Merrill Lynch ARTEAMERICAS which interprets the spirit of an era where representation has shifted to a new medium and meaning. New icons and images of the perfect contemporary mind



Público-Lúdico, 2001
Plaster, oil on wood, 12" x 11" x 1 1/2"

continue to emerge incessantly. Contemporary Art in Latin America does not know borders any more. Latin American artists are part of the global world and they produce multifarious images sharing the global spectrum of cultural, ideological, political and social "baggage" that renders new visibilities and questions the insignificant, the private, and the ordinary, away from the "objectified" world of representation. Contemporary artists construct and deconstruct from the mass culture and from the collective platforms.

Contemporary Art deals with a variety of images addressed as an ensemble of metaphors that range from femininity to culture, from nature to the industrial, from aesthetics to kitsch. On intervention over nature, between the fake and the industrial, the natural and the organic, are the site specific installations of Silvia Riquezes and Guerra de la Paz, who have modified the vision of the garden. In an intervention over architecture, there is the work of Pablo Contrisciani, who has "invaded" and highly transformed the facade of the building. Carolina Sardi presents a biomorphic intervention over the



Ani Villanueva. Manimal Installation, 2004
Ensamblaje de Materiales
Diversos, piezas de 4' sq cada una.

environment. Pedro Vizcaino creates a delirious woman-car made in "papier-mâché", where the grotesque combines with the humorous in a sort of "masculine" toy with a feminine touch. Indoors there are several aerial installations hanging from

the ceiling, over the corners of the interior of the building. Ani Villanueva presents a zoomorphic shape made in plastic, spotlighting the power of the industrial and the fake over nature. Lucía Pizani and Hermann Mejía show a magic rubber man as a metaphor for contemporary human beings; Valeria Cordero and Pilita García propose, in a collaborative work, a big "linguistic" ball full of thoughts and ideologies. Nancy Saleme exhibits a sequence of transparent curtains with written messages floating in the air; Cristina Botero shows a canvas with luminous effects and dream-like images of the feminine. Along the same path, Iratxe Larrea proposes a large "towel" as an image of the home. Alejandra Villasmil sets a small sculpture, a sort of oval shape in a nest, as an origin of the primal world.

PARTICIPANT ARTISTS:

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|--------------------|---------------------|
| Silvia Riquezes | Hermann Mejía |
| Valeria Cordero | Pilita García |
| Guerra de la Paz | Nancy Saleme |
| Pablo Contrisciani | Cristina Botero |
| Carolina Sardi | Iratxe Larrea |
| Pedro Vizcaino | Alejandra Villasmil |
| Ani Villanueva | Lucía Pizani ♦ |