



DEFIANCE: The collective called Asco created "Spray Paint LACMA" in 1972, spraying their names on an outer museum wall. The image was printed by Harry Gamboa Jr. in 2008.

LACMA

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### 'Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement'

Where: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles

When: Through Sept. 1

Hours: Noon-8 p.m. Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays; noon-9 p.m. Fridays; 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; closed Wednesdays.

How much: \$12 adults, \$8 seniors and students, free for children 17 and younger

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Thursday, June 5, 2008

## The Chicano movement carries on through art

'Phantom Sightings' and 'Los Angelenos/Chicano Painters of L.A.' revive culture for a new era.

By **RICHARD CHANG**

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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There's a Chicano cultural movement going on, and it's happening not on the streets of Pacoima or Santa Ana, but in the refined galleries of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

An expansive, multimedia exhibition called "Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement" is on view at LACMA through Sept. 1. The show features 31 Mexican American artists and 120 works, including painting, sculpture, photography, video and installation.

Plus, opening June 15 at LACMA is "Los Angelenos/Chicano Painters of L.A.: Selections from the Cheech Marin Collection." The exhibit culls from actor and collector Marin's impressive stash, which he has also displayed portions of at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and more recently at the new Muzeo in Anaheim.

The Marin exhibit of nearly 50 works focuses on Los Angeles Chicano artists and represents realistic and figurative portrayals of Mexican American culture in a more traditional medium, painting. Most of the show has been traveling across the country.

"I really feel privileged to bring these paintings back here," said Marin, who was born in South Central L.A. "For a hometown boy, I don't think you could have a bigger thrill."

"Phantom Sightings" is more conceptual and idea-based, with less focus on the art object itself. That approach might disappoint or perplex visitors simply looking for pretty pictures. The artists in "Phantom Sightings" are also younger than those in the "Los Angelenos" show.

"This younger generation are the beneficiaries of those (older Chicano) artists," said Rita Gonzalez, assistant curator of special exhibitions at LACMA. "Some of the artists still have some very strong convictions, and somehow use their work to describe this dissatisfaction with this power imbalance. Other artists, less so."

In general, the artists in "Phantom Sightings" are not constrained by being Mexican American or Chicano – originally a derogatory term for Mexicans in the U.S., yet embraced during the Chicano movement of the 1960s and '70s.

"These artists are looking at the work of the '60s and '70s, but the iteration is very different," Gonzalez said. "Race and ethnicity are being addressed in a less polemic way, a less didactic way than the first generation of artists."

Still, the "Phantom" artists share certain cultural bases in common. They are exploring concepts of inclusion versus exclusion, immigration and high art versus low art.

They are also heavily influenced by music, fashion, pop culture and an immersion in urban life.

### **OUTSIDERS LOOKING IN**

"Phantom Sightings" starts with a photograph titled "Spray Paint LACMA" (1972) by a collective called "Asco" (meaning "nausea" in Spanish). A young Latina hangs out above a LACMA wall, which has been sprayed with the names of the Asco artists – (Willie) Herrón, (Harry) Gamboa Jr. and Gronk (Glugio Nicandro).

It's a statement of resistance and (in some eyes) vandalism that, decades later, has found its way into the hallowed halls of the establishment.

Ruben Ochoa has re-created freeway dividing walls with "Remnants of a Fwy Wall Extraction I" (2006-07) and "What if walls created spaces" (2006). Using a digital print, spray paint, concrete, metal fence posts and steel cables, Ochoa has brought the urban landscape into the art gallery, providing insight into how the freeway – ubiquitous in Los Angeles and Southern California – divides lives.

Margarita Cabrera comments on the simultaneous reality and artificiality of the U.S.-Mexico border through her sculptures. She has made several yucca plants, cacti and succulents out of fabric from actual U.S. Border Patrol uniforms, adding batting, wire, thread and terra cotta.

Cabrera has also stitched together a yellow Volkswagen car out of vinyl, batting, thread and car parts. "Vocho (Yellow)" (2004) is an allusion toward the *maquiladora* factories that, for decades, have produced easily exportable cars such as the popular Beetle.

A collective called "Los Jaichackers" (a take on "hijackers") has constructed "Migrant Dubs" (2008), a fully enclosed room that features a video installation, soundproofed walls and urban Latino music. It's an example of how important music and low-rider sensibilities are to Latino youth.

"Phantom Sightings" takes its name from a quote by artist Gamboa Jr., equating Chicanos in Los Angeles to a "phantom culture." One can see the theme in photo works by Ken Gonzales-Day, who has taken old images of lynchings and erased the victim in each of them. Presented in a gallery room with a reflective wall, it's an eerie look at turn-of-the-century racial violence that implicates the viewer as well.

Victor Estrada has concocted a mind-boggling array of sculptures and paintings, using random, subconscious references that prove that Chicano artists don't have to address ethnicity or being Chicano or Latino at all.

### **CLANDESTINE CROSSINGS**

Julio Cesar Morales studied images from the Immigration and Naturalization Service's Web site documenting methods people have successfully snuck across the U.S.-Mexico border. His "Undocumented Interventions" (2005-07) is an installation with video of Tijuana, music by Eamon Ore-Gira and eight watercolors that depict the smuggling tactics.

A girl is stuffed into a doll piñata; a man sits inside a car passenger seat; another man crouches inside a washing machine. The lengths to which

people go are fascinating and disturbing.

In its catalog and press materials, LACMA states that "Phantom Sightings" is the first major consideration of Chicano art's legacy in almost two decades.

That's a big, bold claim, as surely some other organization has done a Chicano art survey in the past 20 years. LACMA's point of reference is "Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation" at UCLA in 1990-91.

Nonetheless, "Phantom Sightings" is a broad, eclectic, boundary-pushing presentation of contemporary Chicano art. And alongside "Los Angelenos/Chicano Painters," both are rare collections of the aesthetic accomplishments of a growing populace whose influence extends well beyond the boundaries of the art museum.

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