Anyone interested in the work of Suzanne Lacy will enjoy this series. Although an established canon of U.S. Latino/a art history is still developing, the monograph serves the role of “mountain” people with a distinctive experience that would inform her work. Maria Brito (b. 1948) left Havana at age thirteen through Operation Peter Pan, an initiative wherein Cuban parents sent their children to the United States to shield them from the Castro regime. (Ana Mendieta was another Peter Pan child). The story of Brito’s displacement is gripping and compelling, as Martinez brings the reader to empathize with his subject while introducing a critical experience that would inform her work. Brito’s heritage is also crucial in the development of her art, as illustrated in her enigmatic installation Come Play with Us, Childhood Memories (1984), in which a squarish crib (resembling a cage) sits on a wooden floor of a cut out room. Two small ladders, one leading to the crib and

### Notes

1. The racial dimensions in Lacy’s work” are based on the ideas of philosophers Alison Bailey and Marilyn Frye, which focus on “whitely behaviors” and “whitely ways of being in the world (10). Similarly, she adopted Richard Shusterman’s “somaesthetics,” referring to the role of the body in “creation and appreciation of art,” as well as Grant Kester’s “dialogical art” that “foregrounds interchange and process” (11,15).

the other propped up against the wall punctuate the space. A mirror and a framed photo of the piece hang on the wall, along with many painted eyes. Martínez relates the piece to Brito’s sheltered upbringing in a conservative Cuban-American community, positing that the artist’s experience as a mother of teenage boys “prompted [her] to reflect on her own childhood” (8).

Martínez’s biographical structure also divides according to Brito’s primary mediums. “Boxes, Interiors, and Objects: Assemblages, 1980-2000” is a discussion of her original mixed-media constructions, which he calls “assemblages” (23). He relates them to tendencies in American art, comparing Brito to such artists as Robert Rauschenberg, Louise Nevelson, and Joseph Cornell. This chapter is well argued and illustrated, and successfully presents Brito’s most complex body of work. Her early boxes, especially, owe a debt to Cornell, though Martínez is careful to point out that hers are more autobiographical. The author quotes extensively from Brito’s own descriptions of her pieces, effectively capturing her thought process and providing a comprehensive interpretation in her own words. He notes that Self-Portrait in Grey and White (1982) was “her earliest self-portrait, a subject that she later fully developed in painting” (29). Martínez also reads Brito’s large-scale assemblages autobiographically. In El Patio de Mi Casa (1991; Fig. 1), for example, exterior and interior space are collapsed with a nightmarish bed painted on what would be a backyard, opposite a diminutive kitchen space with sundry objects including a lamp, photographs, and a plaster cast of Brito’s face. The author offers both the artist’s assessment—“it is the breaking off from the graphs, and a plaster cast of Brito’s face, of sundry objects including a lamp, photograph, and a plaster cast of Brito’s face” (8)—and nervously watching her fend off an intrusive ogler; a dream in which she floats above a marching band; and a poem/artist’s statement that evokes the complexities of defining the “American” artist in the twenty-first century. Playing off of Alvarez Muñoz’s background as a teacher, Tejada structures his narrative as a lesson plan, covering: Geography, Language Arts, Home Economics, and Civic Studies. In his introduction, titled “Enlightenments: A Lesson Plan,” he makes clear his resistance to a “developmental account” of Alvarez Muñoz’s oeuvre in favor of establishing “evocative relationships” between the artist and her work, “not obligatory ones” (4-5). Thus, he introduces the artist through suggestive anecdotes: a childhood memory of walking down the street with her mother and nervously watching her fend off an intrusive ogler; a dream in which she floats above a marching band; and a poem/artist’s statement that evokes the peculiar dynamics of her bicultural background in the border city of El Paso, where she was born. Rather than a conventional chronological survey, Tejada’s narrative offers a creative series of interconnected essays that illuminate the complex, multifaceted production of a fascinating artist, “viewed from the perspective of Chicana and U.S. Latina vanguard practices, and from the standpoint, too, of mainstream American art produced during the social debates of the 1980s and 1990s” (3).

Tejada characterizes Alvarez Muñoz’s oeuvre—which comprises photography, writing, drawings, and installation—as “postminimalist and postconceptual” (3). By discussing a small number of her...
works but giving comprehensive interpretations of them, he calls attention to their conceptual depth. The first chapter, “Geography,” is primarily devoted to “Abriendo Tierra/Breaking Ground” (Fig. 2), her 1991 exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Art. Here the artist made a significant intervention into the museum space. In the courtyard, she placed an octagonal architectural structure made of wooden beams over a reflecting pool. Within it were suspended two red neon bulbs in the form of an X. The exhibition curator interpreted this as “mark[ing] her own spiritual place” and compared it to Native American dwellings. Tejada concludes that “[a] second glance at the octagonal structure...reveals the artist’s vigorous response to the barefaced collusion between the industrial façade and the colonizing enterprise of U.S. cultural expansion” (12). For the interior, Alvarez Muñoz painted opposite walls in yellow and pink and drew figures on them that evoked both popular culture and ancient traditions. Between them stood a glass wall with a bilingual poem describing the border crossing of the artist’s grandparents and their first impressions of El Paso. The visual and verbal tropes of the piece as a whole are eclectic and purposefully obscure: a monument evoking high modernist abstraction is paired with a kitschy colored walls and cartoon-like figures; the outlaw space of the border is brought into the sacrosanct halls of the museum. Given these enigmatic references, Tejada’s interpretation of Abriendo Tierra is masterful. Drawing on postwar American art, the objects in the museum’s collection, the artist’s family’s past, and the historically contentious relationship between Mexico and the United States, he convincingly argues that the piece “produced a staged reading of national and art historical conflicts” (20) while also engaging in a complex institutional critique. My only criticism is that I would have liked to have seen more details of the piece reproduced. Comparative material by other artists is indeed valuable but becomes redundant when it occupies space that should have been granted to Alvarez Muñoz. Tejada devotes a great deal of attention to Abriendo Tierra because he considers it to offer “a palimpsest of time and place that can serve as a model for looking at her work before and after” (20). As the artist explores “nonlinear locations that [allow] the viewer to move between contradictory layers,” so the author takes the reader on unexpected journeys (20).

The next chapter “Language Arts” begins, of all places, with the exile of General Antonio López de Santa Anna (notorious for ceding a large portion of Mexican territory to the U.S. during the Mexican-American War) in Snug Harbor, Staten Island. There, he met the entrepreneur Thomas A. Adams and gave him a piece of natural gum. The exchange resulted in a new confection, chewing gum, which Tejada relates to military history, recounting how soldiers in World War I chewed gum. Eventually, the story comes back to Alvarez Muñoz: her father was deployed in World War II and brought her back a small Nazi propaganda booklet from Germany. In her artist’s book Enlightenment #2: Double Bubble & WWII (1980-82), the Nazi propaganda pictures are interspersed with Bubble Bubble comics and accompanied by a text recalling the artist’s childhood memories of buying chewing gum. Tejada brings the story back full circle to Mexico: during the Second World War, many Mexican Americans enlisted, creating a shortage of agricultural laborers that led to the establishment of the Bracero Program, which brought a new generation of Mexican migrant workers to the United States. These intricate, bizarrely interconnected narratives call attention to how personal and community histories intersect with world events. This and other pieces from the Enlightenment series discussed in the chapter also comment on the relation between text, image, and subjectivity. Enlightenment #4: Which Came First? (1982) is a series of photographs of five eggs in a row with two lines of text underneath, one printed and another in a child’s cursive writing. On one level, the story illustrates the challenges of learning English. Digging deeper, Tejada shows how it engages with mainstream feminism of the 1980s, “questioning how the subject of feminism ‘must be positioned’ also ‘in relation to social relations other than gender’—wondering which comes first, so to speak, especially when a sense of self is simultaneous and indissoluble” (48).

The art works discussed in the “Language Arts” chapter call attention to the deeply personal nature of Alvarez Muñoz’s practice. The chapter is also the most biographical. Raised in El Paso, she married Andy Muñoz before attending Texas Western College. The couple moved around as a result of Andy’s engineering career and eventually ended up in Arlington, Texas. Alvarez Muñoz pursued a graduate degree in studio art at North Texas State University, studying with Al Souza, a conceptual photographer, and Vernon Fisher, a mixed media...
Rachel Whiteread

Drawings
by Allegra Pesenti

Prestel, 2010

Reviewed by Melissa Johnson

rawings, for Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963) have been private. She calls them “doodles” (27) that function as “a diary of my work” (9). They are a place where she “worries” and “plays” with ideas (10). Rachel Whiteread Drawings is the catalogue for an exhibition held during 2010-11. While Whiteread previously showed her drawings after a 1993 DAAD residency in Berlin, this exhibition marked the first museum retrospective of the drawings, which constitute an archive in her studio and a trace of the process of her sculptural work, although there is not a literal relationship between the two. The catalogue includes two beautifully illustrated essays, 125 color plates organized according to the subjects of Whiteread’s work and specific projects, and a visual essay curated by Whiteread comprising objects she collected throughout her career. This essay appeared in the exhibition as a series of objects in vitrines.

The primary essays, by Allegra Pesenti, curator of the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts at the Hammer Museum, and Anne Gallagher, Head of Collections (British art) at the Tate, are in some respects, very similar. Pesenti and Gallagher each comment on the same bodies of Whiteread’s work, yet their foci and their writing styles are very distinct, and so the two offer different perspectives, giving the reader a greater understanding of why works on paper have been so important for Whiteread.

Pesenti, in “Like Shallow Breaths: Drawings by Rachel Whiteread,” writes with a succinct yet elegant sparseness, poetically illuminating Whiteread’s work and studio practice with a beautiful clarity. She connects Whiteread’s drawings back to fifteenth and sixteenth century Renaissance master drawings by sculptors such as Michelangelo, and traces this practice through to the twentieth century, referencing artists such as Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Alison Wilding, Richard Tuttle, Eva Hesse, and

Told You (1990), which the artist exhibited in a group show there. A wooden dental cabinet was filled with sundry objects and “became the centerpiece for stories amassed over time and submitted by the artist and members of the communities that hosted the installation” (77). Thus, history was shown to be both contingent and communal: “material objects and memory were interrelated fragments in the discontinuous experience that produced knowledge” (82). This and the installation El Límite (1991), are the main subjects of this section. El Límite featured wall drawings based on photographs of the Mexican Revolution as well as two large-scale photographs, each with a poem, of a toy train made of recycled cans. Multilayered and complex, El Límite references Aztec motifs, typographic history, the railroad culture of El Paso, and the artist’s father. Tejada weaves a captivating narrative around the piece to explore themes related to “technologies of vision,” political geography, and globalization. He effectively demonstrates how Alvarez Muñoz’s critical dialogue with mainstream art and its institutions exposes “features of a culture often neglected by histories of art founded only on aesthetic form” (94).

As part of the A Ver: Revisioning Art History series of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, María Brito and Celia Alvarez Muñoz both live up to the promise made by the series editors in that they form the basis for a meaningful art history. As such, they help to redefine contemporary “American” art in more inclusive terms and lay the groundwork for a comprehensive history of U.S. Latino/a art.

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Notes
1. For Dina Comisarenco Mirkin’s review of Karen Mary Davalos’ Yolanda M. López (2009), also part of this series, see WAJ (Spring/Summer 2010): 57-59.