mining and other energy industries. Its residents are mostly poor, working-class "mountain" people with a distinctive local culture. The land and people exemplify the kinds of power relations that have always interested Lacy: big energy companies strip mining, blasting off mountain tops, their drilling and mining rights superseding those of local landowners, a large percentage of workers suffering from black lung, cancers, and other often fatal diseases caused by environmental pollution. The project involved performances of music, storytelling, and two hundred church choir members walking toward the bridge that spans the Big Sandy River. Lacy wrote that this

> performed photograph is virtually motionless, the narrative moment subtle: the sun sets, the river flows under the bridge, the music's rhythmic trajectory, and the unexpected improvisations of CSX locomotives passing up the canyon. As sunlight moves up the hollow and out of the valley, the bridge slowly lights up, long purple shadows interrupted by circling beams that replicate a runaway train engine (317).

Lacy's career is still moving forward. Moira Roth concludes her Introduction by saying "…I am deeply interested in what she will do in the future with her brilliant imagination, her constant curiosity, her restless energy, and her engaged politics (xli). In the Afterword, Kerstin Mey writes that "Suzanne Lacy's practice both typifies and probes contemporary preoccupations with dialogic, relational, and socially engaged aesthetic strategies and expanded art praxis in the public domain. The title of this book—covering her work to date—signals in programmatic terms a decisive departure from the territory of 'institutional(ized)' art" (327).

Leaving Art adds to the scholarship of contemporary art and feminist studies by gathering in one place essays and projects by this prolific writer and artist, as does Sharon Irish's *Spaces Between*. Both will interest and benefit scholars, students, and the general public who are drawn to socially engaged art and explorations of power. ●

Brenda Mitchell is Associate Professor of Art History at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where she teaches courses in modern and contemporary art.

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).
2. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986); quoted in Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 155.

María Brito

by Juan A. Martínez
UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2009

Celia Alvarez Muñoz

by Roberto Tejada
UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2009

Reviewed by Tatiana Flores

Reading these two books from the A Ver: Revisioning Art History series together prompts a reconsideration of the medium of the monograph, especially in relation to the emerging field of Latino/a art history. In the traditional discipline, the monograph is rarely questioned, as it is assumed that all canonical artists merit a platform for showcasing their individual production. In the absence of an established canon of U.S. Latino/a art, the monograph serves the role of anointing artists in a manner that risks replicating mainstream structures of an art history founded on Renaissance values, where authorship is tantamount. Nevertheless, the monograph format is justified by the series editors, based on "the conviction that individual artists and their coherent bodies of work are the foundation for a meaningful and diverse art history" (ii).[1] Both *Maria Brito* and *Celia Alvarez Muñoz* make strong cases for this vision from very different perspectives.

Juan A. Martínez approaches his subject biographically. María 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 Martínez 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

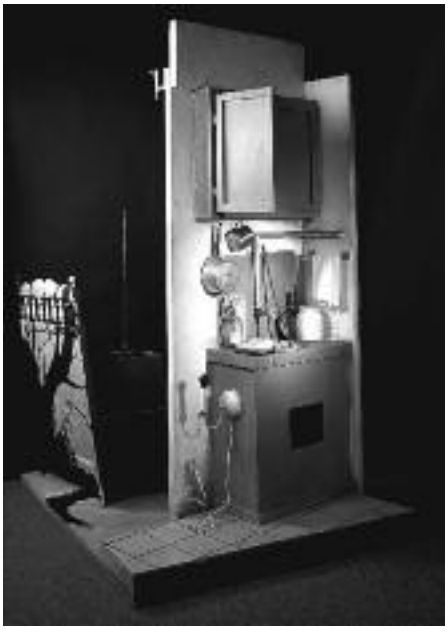

Fig. 1. Maria Brito, *El Patio de Mi Casa* (1991), acrylic on wood and mixed media, 95" x 63" x 68". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C..

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 past"—as well as other interpretations to illustrate the work's multivalence (41). Martínez's sensitive reading underscores the relevance of Brito's piece as paradigmatic of the American immigrant experience, arguing convincingly that drawing on her own life is not a hermetic, individualistic practice but rather an exercise in the creation of community. Such a view paves the way for a discussion of her more overtly socially oriented constructions. *Pero Sin Amo* (1999-2000) memorializes the plight of the *balseros*, those Cubans who attempt to reach Florida in makeshift rafts, with a wooden maze "of coffinlike boxes covered in transparent vinyl, offering glimpses of sand-covered shoes, glasses, and body parts" (49). Platforms on either side with binoculars allow spectators to interact with the piece.

Shifting to self-portraiture and painting in the next section, "Self-Portraiture: Paintings, 1983-2002," is a challenge, and Martínez wisely reproduces *Self-Portrait*, a 1989 construction—making for a smoother transition—before delving into a discussion of Brito's paintings. These are strongly based on Renaissance models and employ an abundance of Catholic iconography. *The Juggler* (1989), the book's cover image, depicts the artist as the Madonna juggling a baby boy, wood spheres, and a small house against a background that reproduces Mantegna's *Madonna and Child with Cherubim* (c. 1485), and with a painted mask on a dark backdrop below. While Brito's portraits depict the challenges that gender constructions and her Catholic heritage have imposed upon the artist, here the central figure appears in control of the objects in the air, introducing "a good dose of ambiguity," in the author's words (67).

Brito's more recent production (covered in "Sculpture, 2004-2006") and her legacy are evaluated in the final chapters of the book. In the past decade, she has taken a more pronounced role as social critic, veering away both from the autobiographical and mixed media constructions. Brito's primary medium has become white polymer clay, which she models to form small scale figures. Attempting to reconcile pieces such as *Of Mice and Men* (2005) and *Las Goyescas* (2005-06), inspired by Goya's *Caprichos* (1799)—elaborate, detailed, and realistic—with her earlier production, Martínez writes: "[h]er figurative sculptures…synthesize her enduring attraction to surreal situations and her expressionist approach to form" (80).

Martínez is a generous writer. He dedicates a good deal of space to Brito's own testimonies, and in his final chapter, "Breaking Barriers," gives due credit to critics and art historians who have addressed her production and evaluates how her work has been framed. While citing that Brito herself does not want to be pigeonholed exclusively as a Cuban American artist, he also notes that much of her recognition coincides with the embrace of multiculturalism in the American art world. Through his careful assessment of Brito's oeuvre, Martínez weaves a compelling narrative whose relevance extends beyond her particular work. He convincingly argues for Brito's recognition as an American artist, and in so doing advocates for a more plural understanding of "American" art.

Roberto Tejada's monograph on Celia Alvarez Muñoz (b. 1937) also sheds light on 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; 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 th[e] 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).

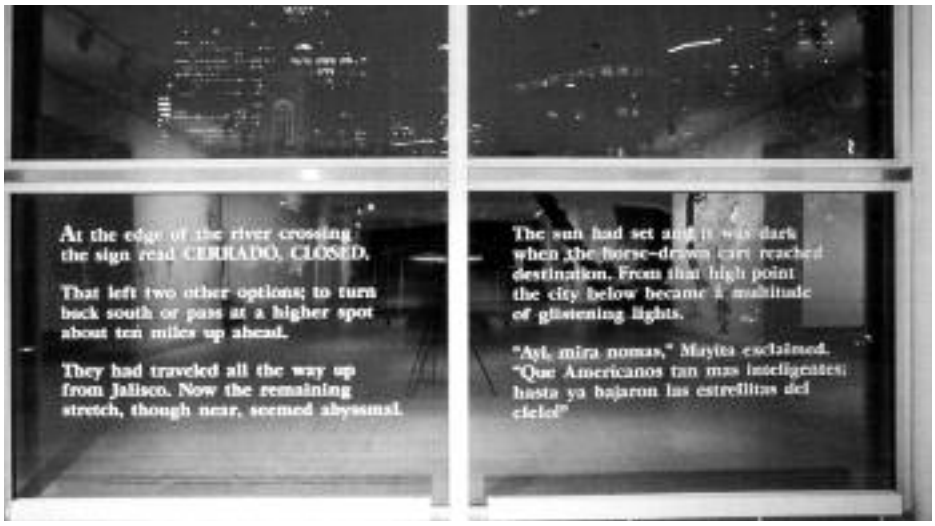

Fig. 2. Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Abriendo Tierra/ Breaking Ground* (detail) (1991), mixed media installation, Dallas Museum of Art. View of text on glass wall. Photo: Celia Alvarez Muñoz.

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 Dubble 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

artist who wed text and image. Tejada traces their influence on Alvarez Muñoz and also discusses the mainstream art world of the 1970s, effectively setting up a critical framework around which to evaluate her early practice. The following chapter "Home Economics" fast forwards to the 1990s and focuses on a body of work exploring gender and labor, "address[ing] manufacture and consumption on a transnational level as well as in terms of artistic production" (55). Tejada discusses at length the artist's book *If Walls Could Speak* (1991), of women factory workers from Los Angeles and El Paso in the 1930s and 40s, and *Fibra and Furia: Exploitation Is In Vogue* (1999-2002), a mixed media installation which featured rolls of cloth, shoes, and garments exhibited alongside a horrific picture of the legs of a murder victim to protest the serial killings of women in Ciudad Juárez.

Demonstrating the uncanny coincidences that recur in Alvarez Muñoz's work, the final chapter "Civic Studies" takes the reader back to Snug Harbor to explore the piece *Stories Your Mother Never 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 interreliant 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,[1] *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. •

Tatiana Flores is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History at Rutgers University, with a joint appointment in the Department of Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies.

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.

Rachel Whiteread Drawings

by Allegra Pesenti
Prestel, 2010

Reviewed by Melissa Johnson

Drawings, 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.[1] 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

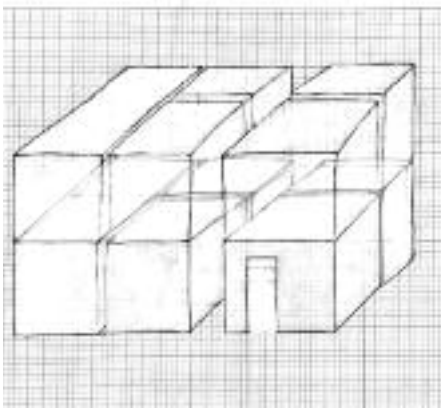

Fig. 1. Rachel Whiteread, *Ghost* (1990), ink and acrylic on graph paper, 11 1/4" x 8 5/8".