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What Is Home? LACMA's New Show of Latino and Latin American Art Has 100 Answers

BY GWYNEDD STUART

FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 2017 AT 10:09 A.M.



Laura Aguilar, *In Sandy's Room*, 1989

Courtesy of the artist and UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, © Laura Aguilar

One of L.A. artist Daniel Joseph Martinez's contributions to LACMA's newest show — a one-room house, built to scale and painted in a cheerful palette — looks like an oversized child's backyard playhouse or maybe an eccentric millennial's tiny home. But walk around the side and you'll find it's been split down the middle, which automatically makes it seem less playful. Called *The House America Built*, the structure is a replica of the cabin in which "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski lived in the Montana woods and where he wrote his manifesto. The paints – in shades of yellow, purple, mauve and a bright mac 'n' cheese orange – are from Martha Stewart's spring 2017 collection. See, both Kaczynski and Stewart are Polish immigrants raised in postwar America, and both are now 75 years old. While one became a symbol of corporate consumerism, the other despised industrialized society to the extent that he killed to make a statement about it.

The 12 galleries that make up "Home – So Different, So Appealing: Art From the Americas Since 1957" – featuring roughly 100 pieces by 40 artists – abound with big ideas about a big concept. And like Martinez's cabin, many of the works are physically large – at least half a dozen are living spaces built to scale. Co-curator Chon Noriega, who worked with the Vincent Price Museum's Pilar Tompkins Rivas and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston's Mari Carmen Ramirez, explains in the exhibit's press materials, "This exhibition is not a historical survey but a thematic investigation of home – a dwelling, residence or place of origin – an embodiment of one of the basic concepts for understanding an individual or group within a larger physical and social environment. Here the artists speak across art history and social history in order to get at something about home that is so different, so appealing." This is the first exhibit in the Getty's upcoming Latino and Latin American art bonanza, "Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA," which largely launches in September at institutions across the city.



Daniel Joseph Martinez's *The House America Built*

Gwynedd Stuart

Despite the show's subtitle, "home" isn't presented as appealing in much of the work, at least not in any traditional sense. Rather than being grouped geographically or presented chronologically, the pieces – created by artists from all over Latin America and the United States – are organized by concept in order to create a dialogue across time and place. In the section "Archaeology of the Home," Brooklyn-born artist Raphael Montañez Ortiz's sculptures, grotesque masses of stuffing, wood and springs made from destroyed furniture in the early 1960s, hang on the wall, while Leyla Cárdenas' 4-inch excision from a home in Bogotá, created in 2012, sits in the middle of the room.

In the section "Recycled Homes," there's the Argentine art collective Mondongo's polyptych *Políptico de Buenos Aires*, which was completed in 2016 but is styled after a 15th-century altarpiece. The centerpiece depicts Villa 31, the enormous shantytown that surrounds the city, a precarious-looking pile of structures constructed at least in part from found materials. There's a sinkhole in the middle of the street that looks poised to suck in the mass of buildings and people; a woman in sunglasses and a thong bikini sunbathes right next to the pit, oblivious to its hunger.



Carmen Argote, *720 Sq. Ft. Household Mutations – Part B* (pictured here at gallery G727), 2010

Courtesy of the artist, © Carmen Argote

L.A. artist Carmen Agote continues her exploration of domestic spaces as keys to her family's immigrant history with *720 Sq. Ft. Household Mutations – Part B*, for which she removed the carpet from her 720-square-foot childhood home. The viewer can ponder the stains and their stories and also get a feel for the size of a home in relation to the massiveness of the gallery.

Perhaps the most literal instance of a dialogue between spaces is Puerto Rican artist Pepon Osorio's piece *Badge of Honor*, which features an exact replica of a father's jail cell next to a fantastical, baroque representation of a son's bedroom. There are posters and trophies and a bike and walls plastered with baseball cards, but certain features – golden fists with rhinestone rings punching out from the bedframe, for instance – make it a dreamlike space, a boy's fantasy room injected with steroids. In a projection on the wall of the bedroom, a teen boy asks questions of his imprisoned father, while in a projection on the wall of the jail cell, the father, missing his two front teeth, answers. He describes in sweet detail memories of the boy as a baby, how he would gladly get up in the middle of the night to change diapers and inadvertently be peed on.

In a phone conversation prior to the press preview, Noriega stressed that what he and his co-curators put together is "not a comprehensive survey of the idea of home"; rather, it's home in

a "hemispherical context." The exhibit may not be comprehensive, but it's rich with the humanity of a most human concept.



Salomon Huerta, *Untitled House*

Collection of Sam Schwartz, © Salomon Huerta, photo courtesy Christopher Grimes Gallery

"Home – So Different, So Appealing: Art From the Americas Since 1957," LACMA, BCAM Level 3, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; runs June 11-Oct. 15. lacma.org/art/exhibition/home-so-different-so-appealing.

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