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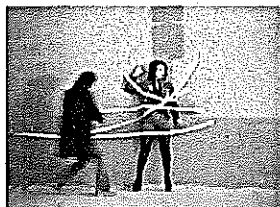
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Asco  
Instant Mural  
1974  
"Phantom Sitings"  
El Museo del Barrio



Margarita Cabrera's Vocho (Yellow), 2004, foreground, with works by Gary Garay, in "Phantom Sitings" at el Museo del Barrio



Alejandro Diaz  
Dichos (Sayings)  
2004  
"Phantom Sitings"  
El Museo del Barrio



Cruz Ortiz  
el corrido de spaztek and how he was freaking out on Freddie the Hawk...  
2008  
"Phantom Sitings"  
El Museo del Barrio

## THE CHICANO AVANT-GARDE by Walter Robinson

Just what is the Chicano avant-garde? "Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement," the impressive new exhibition at el Museo del Barrio, can give you some kind of an idea -- though the show is not altogether straightforward about it, as the evasive title might suggest.

Including more than 100 artworks by 30 artists, the survey was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and appeared in Mexico City, San Antonio, Phoenix and Guadalajara before making its final stop here in New York, Mar. 24-May 9, 2010, the only East Coast venue.

Chicano art has its roots in the 1960s social protest movement, of course, and is generally associated with graphics, murals and paintings that speak, one way or another, to Mexican-American cultural and political issues. For better or for worse, a touchstone for this kind of art has been "Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge," an exhibition from the collection of Cheech Marin that toured extensively during the last decade.

But that's not what we're talking about with "Phantom Sitings." The artists in this show have adopted the "conceptual" language of the avant-garde, and though their Chicano identity can be part of the content of their work, their sensibility reflects the contemporary art idiom as well. Here in art-market central New York, which hastens to monetize every nationalist category (Chinese art, Russian art, Persian art), it's curious to realize that Chicano art is as yet "unorganized," as an auction-house specialist might say.

The exhibition curators -- UCLA Chicano Studies prof Chon Noriega and LACMA curators Rita Gonzalez and Howard Fox -- find an origin of sorts in the activities of the 1970s East L.A. collaborative group known as Asco -- the Spanish word for "nausea" -- founded by Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk, Willie Herrón III and Patssi Valdez, who all met in high school. Their actions included "tagging" the entrances to LACMA in 1972 -- thus claiming as an artwork an institution that had failed to recognize them as artists -- and even more hilariously, taping one or two members of the group to a wall in 1974 as an *Instant Mural*.

The exhibition includes Margarita Cabrera's life-sized soft-sculpture of a yellow Volkswagen, sewn out of vinyl, an appealing work that refers to both sweatshop labor and Mexico's omnipresent "people's car," and a wall of comic cardboard signs by Alejandro Diaz -- reading "Make Tacos Not War," for instance, or "Get Off Your Trust Fund and Do Something" -- that grew out of a series of actions (sometimes in stereotypical Mexican costume) done in front of Tiffany's or the Plaza Hotel on Fifth Avenue in 2003.

Immigration issues are present in many of the works, though rarely played for direct political effect. A large ramshackle construction by San



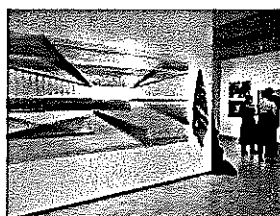
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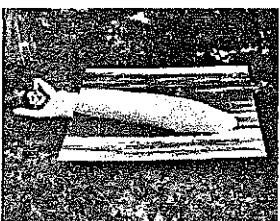
Adrian Esparza  
*One and the Same*  
2005  
El Paso Museum of Art



Paintings by Eduardo Sarabia in  
"Phantom Sightings" at el Museo  
del Barrio



Delilah Montoya  
*Migrant Campsite, Ironwood, AZ*  
(detail and full view)  
2004  
"Phantom Sitings"  
El Museo del Barrio



Carlee Fernandez  
*Self-Portrait as Franz West's  
Sculpture*  
2006  
"Phantom Sitings"  
El Museo del Barrio

Antonio artist Cruz Ortiz, filling the corner of one gallery, turns out to be a catapult designed to throw "missiles of love" over the border wall from the U.S. to his girlfriend in Mexico. For once, the love is flowing southward.

The witty, neo-Duchampian gesture is found in a grid of 25 square color photographs by Juan Capistran, which show the artist break-dancing on a Carl Andre sculpture, and Adrian Esparza's large wall piece, *One and the Same* (2005), in which a colorful tourist serape seems to have been unraveled, with the yarn arranged on the wall into a geometric image suggestive of classic Latin American modernism.

The show does include paintings, good ones, by Carolyn Castaño, who surrounds her portraits of sternly confrontational women with bright tropical motifs, and Eduardo Sarabia, who overlays images taken from family snapshots with painted trompe-l'oeil blobs.

The show features haunting photographs of abandoned migrant campsites in the desert by the Houston-based Delilah Montoya, and a large series of images looking in through the graffiti-scarred windows of lavanderias by L.A. photog Christina Fernandez. Carlee Fernandez, another artist from L.A., is represented by a comic series of black-and-white self-portraits -- posing, via large photos covering her face or body, as well-known artists and their artworks. These last aptly illustrate the rupture -- or is it integration? -- involved in the "identity politics" in this challenging exhibition.

"Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement," Mar. 24-May 9, 2010, at el Museo del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10024.

**WALTER ROBINSON** is editor of *Artnet Magazine*.

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