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HOT TYPE

UCLA Research Center Publishes New Book Series on Latino Artists

By PETER MONAGHAN

SEEING LATINO

ART: A new book series, **A Ver:**

Revisioning Art

History, attempts to present the work, life,

and significance of up to 150 Latino artists whose contributions to American art history have been in danger of going unrecorded.

"Latino artists have been at the forefront of artistic innovations over the past six decades, including found-object sculpture, installation art, and conceptual art," says **Chon A. Noriega**, the editor of the series. "But these artists have not been part of the historical record, museum collections, and arts education."

The series is the first devoted to the artistic and cultural contributions of Latino artists, says Mr. Noriega, a professor of film, television, and digital media at the University of California at Los Angeles. He is also the director of UCLA's **Chicano Studies Research Center**, which will publish the series, and has been creating a database of oral histories with the artists that will be available through the center's library and the UCLA Oral History Program.

He and other editors of the series want to alert art educators, exhibition curators, scholars, and students to this oft-ignored body of work. After holding community forums that brought together artists, curators, scholars, and collectors, the center set up a national advisory board that identified 150 established Latino artists, few of whom have been written about other than in brief exhibition


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reviews, and commissioned the first 10 books in the series, each of which will focus on a single artist. The publications will begin appearing next winter.

Says Mr. Noriega: "We ran the names through indexes of art history and came up with very little on them, even though some are quite well established and well known in the international art world. They have had no presence in art history, and are not being taught in art-history classes." Such artists need "sustained critical, scholarly work that looks at their life and their body of work and tries to make sense of it."

The books will each include 80 to 100 color illustrations -- art reproductions, photographs, and other documents -- and an essay of about 25,000 words.

Among *A Ver's* first subjects is **María Magdalena Campos Pons**, a Cuban-American artist whose work has been featured in solo shows worldwide and numerous biennales. Her in-demand installations juxtapose photography, painting, film, performance, and sculpture and often deal with the African diaspora. **Cheryl Finley**, an assistant professor of art history at Cornell University, will write about Pons, who will be the subject of a major retrospective in 2007 at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Max Benavidez, a Los Angeles-based art critic, will write about **Gronk** (born Glugio Gronk Nicandro), a Chicano painter, sculptor, digital animator, and performance artist who co-founded the Los Angeles Chicano avant-garde group Asco in 1972. The artist has also collaborated with the Kronos Quartet in a piece in which a microphone was attached to his brush as he painted. Gronk is currently creating an extended animation of his previous work.

Mr. Noriega will write about **Raphael Montañez Ortiz**, a Puerto Rican artist who was a central figure in the Destructivism international art movement. In the late 1950s and the 1960s, Destructivist artists used recycled items such as mattresses and pianos to create works that challenged the detachment of the postwar avant-garde. Mr. Ortiz, who teaches at Rutgers University at New Brunswick, and who will have a major retrospective next year at the Jersey City Museum, continues to work; in one



recent performance, a response to the Iraq war, he destroyed 18 tiny pianos in what he called a "pre-emptive piano-concert destruction." (He also co-founded El Museo del Barrio, in New York, the first Latino art museum in the United States.)

Among the other artists featured in the first batch of publications in the series will be **María Brito**, a Cuban-American artist whose works combining painting and sculpture are installed in the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seoul, South Korea, and in the Smithsonian Institution collection; **Carmen Lomas Garza**, a Chicana artist whose artwork explores family, regional, and Chicano traditions; **Yolanda López**, a Chicana visual artist who is best known for her series that makes personal and political statements using the iconic images of the Virgin of Guadalupe; and **Pepón Osorio**, a Puerto Rican artist whose large, multimedia installations combine a baroque, decorative aesthetic with political commentary on Puerto Rican life in the United States.

The Chicano Studies Research Center will publish the books from its own press, but it has signed a distribution agreement with the **University of Minnesota Press**. The organizers of *A Ver* have also reached agreements with about 20 art museums, research centers, and arts organizations around the country to publicize the series by selling the books in their gift shops, putting on exhibitions of the artists, or presenting the artists in other ways, such as through lectures.

Within a few months, organizers will select and assign the next 10 subjects. Mr. Noriega says he is finding no shortage of scholars to write the books. "We're just hitting at the right moment," he says. "There are relatively few people who write about Chicano or Latino art in art-history departments, but there are a lot from interdisciplinary backgrounds, and from English, Spanish, and history departments." Many are younger faculty members, he says: "A generational shift is taking place."

Initially, artists born before 1930 are being emphasized, he says. "We have to do interviews now, get them on tape, and have their story as they would present it. That won't be the only source, but if you don't have it, you're missing something significant." PETER MONAGHAN

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