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WAYPI California Exhibition



Mel Ramos, Catwoman

We Are You Project's
“California Exhibition”

A Late-Summer 2013 Hispano-Epiphanay



Joe Peña, "Elenora"

Another growing tendency among *WAYPI* artists is "**Metaphorical Realism**," which derives from several Latin American postmodern styles (i.e., Neo-Romanticism, Neo-Symbolism, Neo-Surrealism, Neo-Ultraism, Neo-Magic Realism, Neo-Surrealism as well as *Amnesis* Art), many of which **Metaphorical Realism** has refashioned into a unique and emblematic radical Postmodern "narrative" style that includes (in alphabetical order): Hugo X. Bastidas, Laura L. Cuevas, Olga Cruz, Gerardo Castro, Williams Coronado, Roberto Marquez, Gabriel Navar, Raphael Montanez Ortíz, Joe Pena, Jimmy Pena, Jesus Rivera, José Rodeiro, Raúl Villarreal and others.

For example, upon arriving in the US, Mexican-born master Roberto Marquez first dwelled in Arizona, eventually establishing himself in New York City's Metropolitan Area, as well as spending considerable time in Australia. His elegant, imaginative, sensitive, and poetic paintings envision fantastic dream worlds replete with vivid symbolic images. Marquez's encaustic and oil on wood piece titled, "**The Map of Mexico**" is a visionary and iconic image ingeniously depicting a pre-1848 map of Mexico, as it was prior to the Peace Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (near Mexico City), which ended the US War with Mexico (1846-1848), as well as establishing a new boundary-line between the United States and Mexico along the Rio Grande and (before 1853) the Gila River. The treaty permitted the United States' purchase of over-525,000 square miles of Mexican territory for a mere \$15,000,000 (dollars), thereby attaining Arizona, California, western Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah, and few hectares of Oklahoma, Kansas, Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon. In full accord with Henry David Thoreau's vehement opposition to President James K. Polk's notion of "manifest destiny," Marquez's "**The Map of Mexico**" describes a "timeless" Mesoamerican child comprehending (or "grasping") the *Amnesis* (3b) implications of this unfathomable and overwhelming historical and geographical "loss" that forever functions as an invariable gigantic "lost object" — lost within a vast universal collective-*lacuna* that has, in due course, inspired Latino artists from Diego Rivera to Marquez.

Perhaps **WAYPI Metaphorical Realism** (with its revolutionary return to human *artisanal* methods of creativity, and with its "renewed" emphasis on poetry as a constituent element in visual art) might be a means toward the long-awaited "Neo-Renaissance;" to end the current "Techno-Dark Age" that has crippled visual art and poetry for decades. **WAYPI Metaphorical Realism** could be an instrument in the revitalization art-as-"**Art**" (returning visual art to the visual — both *the visceral* (seeing) and *visionary* (seeing)) by ending, at long last, the cynical "**anti-art**" dogmatic *academic* "Neo-Dada Establishmentarianism," which today reaches out to rule the art world.

In *The New Criterion*, art critic Barbara Rose once observed that by their inherent "Outsider" status, minority artists in the USA are

generally insulated and protected from the aesthetic dogma of the “ever-conceptual” Anti-Art establishment. For this reason, Latino artist (as well as other minority artists) are free (without restraint) to pursue art as “Art.” They are even free to paint using brushes, using their eyes, painting from their heart, mind, soul, guts, etc., because as outsiders, they are free from the chains of the art industry. Latinos can, as a result, exert greater devotion, imagination, love, and passion to their art; consequently doing their art as if it mattered. Thus, Rose perceived in her article that they might be among the only contemporary artists actually doing valuable worthwhile art of any consequence in the USA. The implication of being an “Outsider” plays into the desire within **WAYPI** *Metaphorical Realism* to engender and foster a “New Renaissance,” an ambition best expressed by a prophecy hidden in the last lines of Federico Garcia Lorca’s poem *Ode to Walt Whitman*, where a dark *duende* inspired these prophetic words:

*I long for the strongest wind from the deepest night
to clear away flowers and words from the arch where you sleep,
while a black boy warns white gold mongerers*

“At last, arrives the sovereign-reign of a maize-tassel!”

— Federico Garcia Lorca

As young children, two Cuban American “*Metaphorical Realist*” **WAYPI** artists, Raúl Villarreal and José Rodeiro admired the *Proto*-Postmodern painters: Salvador Dalí, Rene Magritte, and Mel Ramos. Hence, allusions to Magritte and Dali appear in Villarreal’s oil on canvas titled *Ambos Mundos*, which depicts a shimmering Neo-Romantic seascape that surrounds a perfectly centered floating picture of a solitary Cuban fishing boat (CHECK the central boat-detail from Villarreal’s ‘*Ambos Mundos*’). The boat also references Villarreal’s familial connection to Ernest Hemingway’s *Old Man and the Sea* [(research the best-selling book *Hemingway’s Cuban Son* by Rene Villarreal and Raul Villarreal)]. As a whole, the image commemorates — as well as memorializes, the more than 90,000 Cubans who (from 1959 until today) died at sea on *balsas* (makeshift *rafts*) seeking “freedom,” “justice,” and asylum from the Castro Brothers’ dictatorship.

Like Villarreal, Salvador Dalí’s *Persistence of Memory* as well as Mel Ramos’s numerous reclining figures directly inspired Rodeiro’s oil-on-canvas portrait of Oshun, which is titled *Agua Dulce (Oshun Asleep)*, 2013. This image asserts that contemporary Caribbean art and culture is inherently African art and culture. Moreover, this unique *Neo-Negritude* (*Neo-Negrisme*) and *Neo-Tropicália* is an Afro-Caribbean cultural imperative, which syncretistically blends Yoruba’s elemental cosmology with an array of specific Roman Catholic saints. For example, the *orisha* Oshun is explicitly identified as being “Our Lady of Charity,” who is also known to Cubans as “Our Lady of El Cobre:” The Patron Saint of Cuba. Hence, many Cuban women invoke Oshun, as their personal divinity. Also, Oshun is celebrated as the goddess of sexuality, eroticism, and sensuality, which are three key or intrinsic or socio-regional qualities or pillars that best define the innate creative genius of Caribbean culture, especially in Cuba. A reality that Cuban master, Raul Villarreal always reassured, saying to Rodeiro, “Think of ‘Mother Africa;’ . . . consider ‘Mother Africa.’”

In this Cuban-Caribbean work, the viewer miraculously stands on the banks of the River Oshun, Nigeria, while three Cuban yellow butterflies (*Phoebis Avellaneda*) dance like Hesiod’s ancient graces: giving, receiving, and returning. Rodeiro depicts the goddess Oshun asleep, dreaming at nightfall under a slender crescent moon that converses with three fixed stars. In the distance is Oshun’s sacred *Erin Ijesha Waterfall*. Behind the goddess, strange abstract anonymous sculptures of Oshun and Shango scan the river; these existing 3-D works look like extraterrestrials: aliens (indirectly alluding to the general **WAYPI** immigration-related aesthetic). In the image, water flows all around Oshun and through her, as evening ascends; and everything golden-yellow is ascribed to her.

Another *Metaphorical Realist* depiction of a woman is Tex-Mex master, Joe Peña’s oil on panel “*Elenora*,” 2013, which is part of a series of images of immigrants and undocumented émigrés, which opens a window into the life and work of Mexican nomadic migrants that routinely pass through Texas heading to diverse destinations throughout “El Norte,” like Chicago, Denver, Dover (NJ), etc. The painting of “Elenora” depicts her as a brave and bold young woman, one moment before she crossed the New Mexico border into her “United States destiny” (which could be either “The American Dream” or American nightmare). In *footnote #9* (below) is Joe Peña’s compelling account of what transpired.(9)

Another Puerto Rican-American artist disillusioned by both USA’s and several states’ official policies aimed at Latinos is Puerto Rican visual artist, Olga Cruz. In her image titled *Mi Bella Vieques (My Beautiful Vieques)*, Cruz iconologically investigates historical events on Puerto Rico’s little sister Island, Vieques, where between 1941 and 2001, the US Navy and its Marine Corp unilaterally (without permission) used the tiny island’s southern peninsula as a massive firing range for naval gunnery target practice.