



José Rodeiro, *Agua Dulce*
(*Ochun Asleep*), oil on canvas,
16" x 20".

WE ARE YOU INTERNATIONAL

LATINO ARTISTS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

For those of us living in Boston's MetroWest region, it's a given that for the best pupusas, or to catch a Capoeira practice, a visit to Framingham is a sure bet. The town is a known enclave of Latino businesses, from hole-in-the-wall taco stands to Colombian bakeries to Brazilian ... everything. But "Latino," this pan-ethnic label of a population predicted to claim the US majority by 2070, can be hard to pin down.

To help us access the enormity of the Latino identity and the idea of "Latinization" today from an art world standpoint, enter Framingham's Fountain Street Fine Art (FSFA). This summer, FSFA hosts the New England edition

of "We Are You Project International," a traveling exhibition of 36 contemporary Latino artists and poets with roots in over a dozen Latin American nations.

Launched in 2012 by artist Raúl Villarreal with a show at New York City's Wilmer Jennings Gallery at Kenkeleba House, the We Are You initiative was envisioned as a spotlight on the contributions of U.S.-Latinos within America's history in the context of socio-political struggles for civil rights, tolerance and freedom. It is the first comprehensive, 21st Century, coast-to-coast exhibition of its kind, as well as the first traveling exhibition hosted by FSFA.

Gallery co-director Marie Craig revisited how FSFA first connected with Villarreal about 18 months ago: "We were thinking about how to tap into local diversity and get our neighbors to meet each other. I researched and found this ready-made exhibition and we started to talk."

Villarreal's "Ambos Mundos (Both Worlds)" oil painting portrays an ocean teased by fleeting rays of light. A sepia-toned, framed painting within a painting of a wooden boat pays tribute to the balseros (rafters) who risk everything to illegally emigrate from Cuba to Florida. "Survivors of the crossing often feel like they are living in two

worlds – trying to find a life somewhere else,” relates Villarreal. The title also alludes to the Havana hotel where Ernest Hemingway lived in the 1930s. Villarreal’s father, Rene Villarreal, was majordomo of Hemingway’s Cuban estate for many years, earning him the nickname “Hemingway’s Cuban Son.”

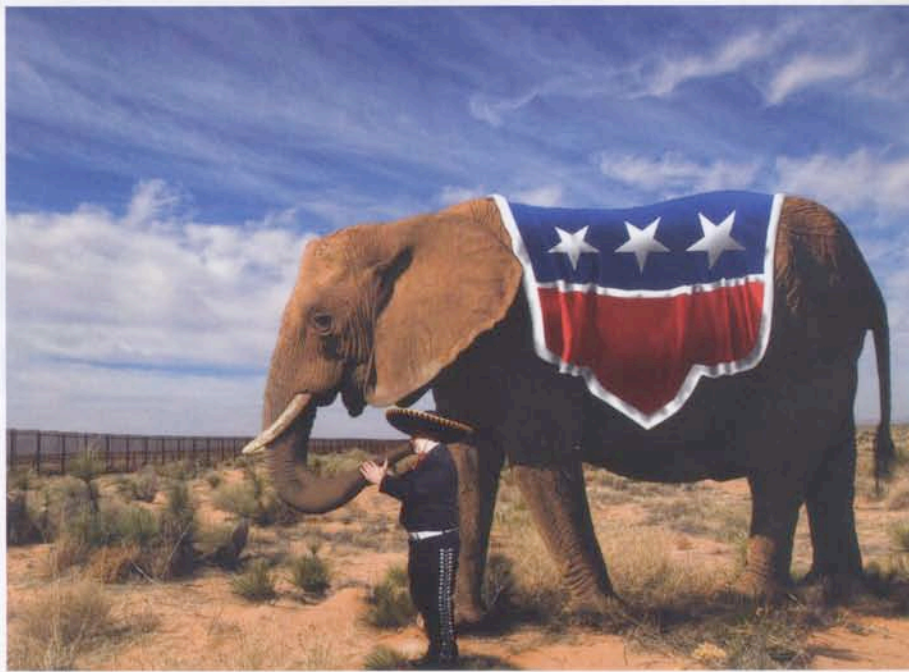
* Figurative work is among the strongest in the show. Joe Peña’s “The mother(f) that is the other brother” is part of the Tejano artist’s series of skillfully painted portraits of migrant workers. The red-rimmed, angry eyes of Peña’s heavily tattooed subject follow you around the gallery. He’s confrontational, scary – yet, the tattoos on his face label him: Chingón, which in Mexican slang can be attributed as “f*#%in’ awesome” or “clever” and chato, variously interpreted as “pug-nosed,” “sweet guy” and “goofy.” The subject’s tattoos reference popular culture, family portraits, even pets. Apparently, this terrifying “other” has a soft spot for Spiderman, SpongeBob and beagles.

Figurative painter Mel Ramos, one of the more widely-known artists in the exhibit, presents “Fraulein French Fries,” a sunset-hued lithograph depicting a nude, blue-eyed blonde rising Venus-like from a familiar red container of French fries printed with the ubiquitous “golden arches” – in this instance doubly suggestive of our Fraulein’s modestly hidden breasts, and the trademark of America’s iconic entry-level job provider and food oasis, McDonalds.

The neo-pop sensibility of Brazilian painter Duda Penteadó’s “All Faces, All Colors” squares off next to Josephine Barreiro’s painting, “Alone.” Pitting inclusivity vs. isolation, Penteadó’s squiggly faces grin out at the world, while Barreiro’s black and white figure hides its face. At first glance these works appear to convey opposing sentiments, but a closer look at both reveals freakishly anthropomorphic feet that are reptilian, amphibian, altogether “other.”

For a category doubly threatened with marginalization, it is refreshing to see that female/Latina artists are well represented in “We Are You,” comprising over one-third of the exhibiting artists.

Raúl Villarreal, *Ambos Mundos*, oil on linen, 36" x 48".



Oxford-educated Puerto-Rican artist, art historian and critic Jacqui Casale presents unapologetic and acerbic naïve art – her mixed-media installation “LATINO” is a grid of six, one-foot-square canvases, each depicting one letter of the title. In an alphabet game, each letter is surrounded by same-letter, identity stereotypes in both pejorative and complimentary terms: L = Laborer, Lazy, Lover, Lush, Liberation, etc. This word play is surrounded by collaged images of religious iconography attributed to Latino populations, including Aztec deities, Catholic saints, and “Latino Santos” of the Afro-Christian cultural mix.

“Our goal is to get the people who come here regularly to get excited by the diversity,” Craig said. “We’re like a little bubble here [in MetroWest]. It feels really fresh to see work that is unfamiliar.”

In addition to the gallery exhibit, “We sent out requests to Latino artists in the Framingham area, and paired them with a dozen local businesses for ArtPOP shows engaging the community in places they normally visit,” says Craig. For a list of ArtPOP sites visit fountainstreetfineart.com.

A poetry reading in the gallery and a film screening of the “We Are You Project Documentary” at Amazing Things Art Center in downtown Framingham were also held during the exhibit’s opening week.

FSFA co-director Cheryl Clinton added: “I feel like a student – looking at this work ... learning about these artists. I feel like I should know more ... I want to know more.”

And there is far more to know about this ambitious show than can be encompassed in a short article. Learn more about “We Are You Project International” at weareyouproject.org and catch it at Fountain Street Fine Art through August 3.

| Meredith Cutler

Ricardo Fonseca, *An Act Of Love*, digital photography manipulation, 24" x 36".

WE ARE YOU: NEW ENGLAND EDITION

FOUNTAIN STREET FINE ART

**59 FOUNTAIN STREET
FRAMINGHAM,
MASSACHUSETTS**

THROUGH AUGUST 3