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Latino Artists

Outside the lines

Seeking Shelter:
Homelessness crisis

Neil Henry's
family quest

One story
of Killing Fields



Maria Medina, "Pleasure"



Maria Medina, "Naked News x 2"

Image: Wikimedia, all pictures

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In part because of his short tenure in Seattle, Sánchez-Vegas has not seen much evidence of a Latino arts community. And yet the irony is that because his work draws on broader themes and Western fine-art traditions, it can be overlooked by galleries or audiences for whom the art of Latin America only means folk art. However, Sánchez-Vegas is eager to point out that this is observation, not criticism. After all, he's come to Seattle with big plans—a multimedia project titled *Circus 5*. This performance project was originally conceived and performed in Venezuela. Since then, Sánchez-Vegas has selected various cities, Belgium in 1993 where he won the Medal of the City of Brussels, and most recently Pittsburgh in fall 2000, in which to develop and present this kaleidoscope of paintings, sculptures, and a 45-minute opera rooted in Greek myth.

Although his work displays a high level of polish (he even makes his own paper) and is easily digested as beautiful, Sánchez-Vegas is primarily interested in conveying the mix of suffering, beauty and the entire range of human emotions. He hopes to have *Circus 5* completed by next year and would like the venue to be as accessible to a range of public as possible—who can argue that life in Seattle doesn't sometimes resemble a circus?

Daniel DeSiga is unapologetic about being a Latino artist. He explained that growing up in a farmworker family and being committed to documenting and celebrating the life of this almost invisible sector of the U.S. workforce (much like Diego Rivera, the internationally famous Mexican painter did during the 1930s and '40s), he "wants to be labeled a Latino artist." Anyone in Seattle who has taken a tour of El Centro de la Raza on Beacon Hill will have seen the first-floor mural sweeping across the east wall. This is one of Daniel DeSiga's first large-scale works. To prove how important art is for any community, particularly during times of struggle, DeSiga began this labor of love when the building was first peacefully occupied in 1972 to establish a Latino center and returned to refurbish and complete a section just in time for El Centro's 25th anniversary.

DeSiga describes his creative passion as a comfort zone. This came early as he experienced a childhood illness that kept him in the hospital for months and then home out of regular school for about three years. During that time drawing became "an escape from my imprisonment." Having lived and exhibited in Santa Fe, N.M., often



Mixed-race artist **Maria Medina** says she misses the strong influence of the **Latino** arts community in New York.

referred to as "the big arena of minority art," DeSiga recognizes that as more and more Latino families are being absorbed into the mainstream they want their children to retain some sense of their past, their own cultural heritage. This recapturing of cultural symbols must be carefully balanced so that the end product is not "quaint Latino" or artwork that ultimately does little more than caricature.

Never mind the pigeonholes, what happens if they can't even tell you're Latina? This is part of the daily dilemma for Seattle-based artist Maria Medina, whose mother is Irish and father Mexican. Medina was first drawn to Seattle by the Cornish College of the Arts Design-Illustration program and now finds that although there are fewer distractions here than in New York City, she misses an arts environment in which Latinos and



Ariela Boronat

other ethnic communities played a significant role. Medina comes from a family of artists (her grandfather was a sculptor) and strives to market her work, given that most artists are conditioned to think it's a "bonus if you sell." Still, Medina has found in Seattle a network of individuals with different interests and social gatherings that inevitably become art discussions. It's clear this community feeds her body and soul.

Medina says she "never had an option not to be an artist" and that her passions run the gamut of raw, urban art, particularly L.A. graffiti, across different disciplines and media. Check out her Web page (www.mariamedinaarts.com) and you'll see visuals combined with language in a vibrant interplay of classical and rebellious images. In November, Medina will lecture at the Seattle Art Museum about her

new body of work titled "Plug In" hosted by Avante-Guard. This work focuses on articulating the "technological revolution" that Medina views as conditioning us to live a certain way, in prescribed context and even language — just think about the last time you wrote a letter without a computer.

For all the four artists the choice of working in different media, often incorporating computer and Web technology into their work, has meant they have been less likely to fit into a niche or compartment. However, this choice has certainly enriched their work and them personally, and allowed them to make a definitive impact on the Puget Sound arts scene. ■

Felicia Gonzalez is a Seattle based poet and freelance writer who was born and raised in Cuba.

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