

Making Sense of Chaos

YLA 12 "EMBRACING CHAOS"

a Mexic-Arte show at the new Mexican American Cultural Center Austin, Texas

by Michael Anthony García

The MACC's (Mexican American Cultural Center) inaugural show is actually part of Mexic-Arte Museum's long running tradition of curating the work of young Latino artists working in Texas under the title "YLA" (Young Latino Artists). The previous eleven incarnations all took place in Mexic-Arte's downtown space, but this year it was moved to the new Cultural Center. This time around, the arduous task of pulling it all together fell on the shoulders of artist and museum employee Angel Quesada.

Quesada was an artist in the YLA11 show, "Juventud Desenfrenada," which roughly translates to "Youth Gone Wild" (even though they mostly kept their shirts on).

The mammoth run for this exhibition, September 15, 2007 to February 23, 2008, has given many people the opportunity to view the work of the six artists chosen by Quesada. It's only fitting that just as many be given the chance to delve into the curator's process in creating YLA 12: "Embracing Chaos."

When asked about how his involvement as curator came about, the normally ebullient Quesada became pensive, "I was a little confused about it myself. It just sort of surfaced and I

was at the right place at the right time." The first time curator's haphazard style and demeanor subconsciously guided the formation of the show. "Embracing Chaos" seemed to be the perfect blending of personal and professional lines in Quesada's reality.

"I was moving, had a car accident, was sick, and it was during all these torrential rain storms in Austin. I just got this put in front of me and I decided I was just going

to do it," he said.

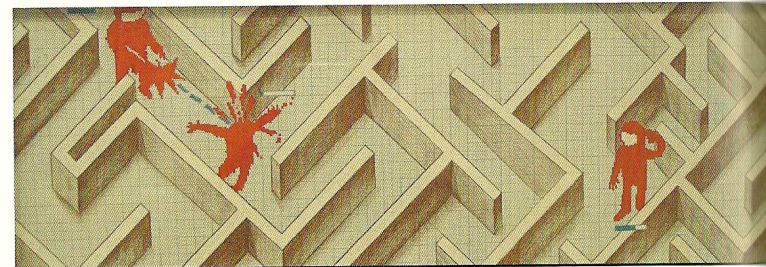
Working at Mexic-Arte, for almost three years gave Quesada the background he needed to assemble the artists for the show. "I've met curators here in Austin, in LA and on the east coast. I tried to get a feel for what people like, but then I threw that all out the window, because it's an opportunity to do something different," said Quesada. With this being the first exposition at the MACC, Quesada didn't have anything to compare his YLA show to as it evolved in the space.

"The MACC was new, and I didn't have any predecessors or anything to really draw from; I didn't know what I was going to get, so I went into it with an open mind and heart," Quesada said.

Within the confines of the YLA parameters, only Latino artists under 35 years of age who live in Texas are eligible to contribute work to the show. Quesada opted against having an open call for entries and instead sought out various people in the know. "I didn't have the support to deal with 50,000 entries, so I depended on professional artists in the field, university connections, and teachers who knew of pockets of activity," he explained.

It was with the help of these contacts that the curator was able to delve into the state's creative hotbeds to search for the exhibition's participants. "I didn't know what I was looking for, and just kept going. Deadlines kept changing. Requirements kept changing," explained Quesada. "What grabbed me was artwork that I could find something of myself in," he added.

"I received a recommendation for Lucilla Flores' work from Flatbed Press here in Austin. The simplicity of the subject of horses mixed with the complexity of the print itself is what



drew me in," said Quesada. "All of the artists can draw and I appreciate the skill," he explained.

In fact, it was this skill that he himself uses as his primary mode of artistic expression that guided him through the chaos. "In San Antonio, I found Enrique Martinez. I was interested in going the "high-art" direction but he can draw really well, and mixed in the subculture of skateboarding," explained the curator.



The complex and controversial images of absurd violence, religious imagery and sexuality in Martinez' work didn't make it into the show without setbacks or a fight, though. "Three pieces of his work were censored from the opening but I've reinstalled them since then," said Quesada.

Next, Quesada traveled to south Mc Allen to see the work of Jesus De La Rosa. "I liked the colors and elaborate nature of his paintings, but wanted to include his drawings because of my drawing fetish," said Quesada. De La Rosa's drawings are displayed in a tall rectangular prism of 9 abstract drawings in simple wooden frames.

Leaving no corner of the state unexplored, he next turned his attention to El Paso where Ana Pilhoefer's embroidery pieces caught his eye.

Photography is represented in the show by Houston artist Chuy Benitez' panoramic works. "There was something about the crowds he photographs," said Quesada, "They have an element of psychology to them."

Gerald Lopez was chosen from a viewing of recent art graduates in Corpus Christi. "Gerald sprawled his work on the floor for me and I saw it and thought, 'Yeah, you're in.' He embodied a lot of what I was doing and fit right in," added Quesada.

Taking on such a massive project, particularly for a first time outing, comes with a huge learning curve. There is always room for improvement, and Quesada is the first person to tell

you about the areas of needed growth. "I probably would have cut down the number of works by each artist," he admits.

Don't let Quesada's inexperience fool you, as he didn't take this opportunity lightly. He worked diligently to market the show in a variety of ways; from having the artists produce banners

that currently wave over the grounds of both Mexic-arte and the MACC, to producing a promotional video that includes interviews with the artists about their work. Quesada plans to have the videos and catalogue available for the closing of the show.

