

Reviews Home My Reviews and Discussions [+ Write a Review or Start a Discussion](#)

Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement

Posted by ArtReview magazine on 11 July 2008 at 12:51pm in ArtReview Magazine Reviews
[View Reviews](#)

Issue 24, July/ August 2008

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
6 April - 1 September

Review by Holly Myers

Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement opens with a selfdeprecating curatorial wink: a 1972 photograph by the collective Asco, depicting an exterior wall of LACMA surreptitiously tagged with the names of three of Asco's artists. Conceived in response to a comment by a LACMA curator that Chicanos didn't make 'fine art', only folk art and graffiti, the stunt was a marvellously sardonic gesture that Asco member Harry Gamboa Jr, referred to as 'the first conceptual work of Chicano art to be exhibited at LACMA'. It is a fitting epigraph for an exhibition distinguished in large part by the conceptual sophistication of its dozenplus artists, most of whom were still in the nursery when Asco was formed. Indeed, the show is, in many ways, the fulfilment of what Asco anticipated in the piece: a generation of Chicano art (or more neutrally, art by Americans of Mexican descent) that embraces the strategies and histories of the mainstream artworld without denying the particularity (and value) of its own socioeconomic circumstances; that demands the attention of the institution without, ultimately, being contained by it.

No one is more wary of the dangers in mounting a 'surnamebased exhibition' than the curators themselves (Rita Gonzalez, Howard Fox and Chon Noriega), whose introduction to the catalogue reads like a tentative contract reached after a long night of tense negotiations. They don't claim to represent all of Chicano art, to redress all past grievances, to resolve the issue of Chicano art's underrepresentation in mainstream institutions or even to speak for all of the artists in the show when claiming the designation. Indeed, they tread lightly around the very term, evident in the coy use of the word 'after' in the show's title. But in the uneasy silence that seems to have followed the closing of the 'identity politics' chapter of contemporary art history – a silence that, in a more cynical frame of mind, might be mistaken for a collective sigh of relief on the part of white male heterosexual artists, curators and critics everywhere – certain sociological facts persist, as does the more general question of art's relationship to its racial and cultural conditions of production.

It's to the credit of the curators that, but for this bit of public handwringing, they surrender most of the big questions to the artists themselves, who tackle them with great curiosity, humour and intelligence: Juan Capistran's photographs of himself breakdancing on what might be a Carl Andre sculpture; Carlee Fernandez's self-portraits in the guise of her father and other male role models; Margarita Cabrera's sculptures of agave plants made from the fabric of old US Border Patrol agent uniforms; Rubén Ortiz Torres's minimalist monochromes made with custom car paint; Ruben Ochoa's installation of a freeway mural he mounted last year in East LA, its backside still caked with glue and concrete; Alejandro Diaz's wonderfully droll hand-printed signs, originally hawked along New York's Fifth Avenue ('Make Tacos Not War', 'Mexicans Without Borders') – these are smart, extremely canny works that, Chicano or no (but certainly not in spite of being Chicano), speak to the supreme importance of the artist's attention to his or her own surroundings.

Tags: [chicano movement](#), [los angeles county museum o...](#), [asco](#), [phantom sightings: art afte...](#), [holly myers](#)

[Share](#)

[Reply to This](#)

[Follow](#) – E-mail me when people reply

[Sign Up](#)
or [Sign In](#)



Reviews
Write your own,
comment on others >>

Art Review: Digital
The entire magazine on your screen.
FREE every month >>

Groups
Join in, start your own >>

POWER 100
ArtReview's countdown
of the artworld's biggest players >>

Latest Activity

[Ekaterina Alexander](#) left a comment for [artreview.com](#)
14 seconds ago

[tony south](#) commented on the blog post [In the doghouse: Oleg Kulik's zoophilia photos seized by police at FIAC](#)
48 seconds ago

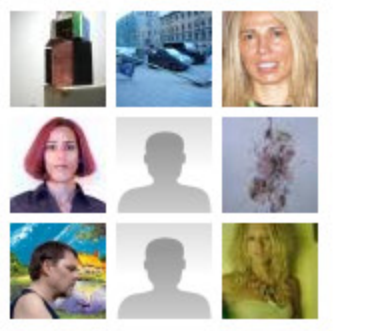
[Ann Mc Cormick](#) added 3 photos.
[View Artworks](#)

2 minutes ago

[Ekaterina Alexander](#) commented on the photo [before](#)
4 minutes ago

[RSS](#)

Members



[+ Invite More](#) [View All](#)

