

ART

What 'home' means to U.S. Latino and Latin American artists

U.S. Latino and Latin American artists take on the idea of home -- and find it has emotional and political meaning.

JUN 14, 2017 By [Avishay Artsy](#)





Pilar Tompkins Rivas, co-curator of LACMA's show "HOME — So Different, So Appealing," stands in front of Daniel Joseph Martinez's installation "The House America Built." Photo by Avishay Artsy.

Ted Kaczynski, known as the Unabomber, lived in isolation in a cabin in Montana for many years, sending out bombs and letters to scientists in protest of their work.

In 2004, the artist Daniel Joseph Martinez built a replica of the cabin. The peak-roofed house, about the size of a one-car garage, is split down the middle. It's called "The House America Built."

"After the Unabomber was captured... they actually picked up the cabin and they moved the cabin to the courthouse as forensic evidence of his insanity," Martinez said. "Because the way he lived in the cabin, and living in the middle of the wilderness, there was a suggestion that the only kind of person that would do this would be someone who was mentally imbalanced."

The irony, Martinez points out, is that Kaczynski modeled his cabin after Henry David Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond. If this proved Kaczynski's insanity, wouldn't the same be true of Thoreau?

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Every time it's displayed, Martinez repaints the house in the seasonal colors of Martha Stewart Signature paints. In this iteration it's in variations of soft purple, blue and yellow. One side is painted in a camouflage pattern.

Stewart is the same age as Kaczynski, they're both Polish-American, they both attended Ivy League schools, and, says Martinez, "they both represent at the exact same moment a shift in thinking about a direction by which to move a particular way of being in the world. So Kaczynski is studying math but then becomes a homegrown terrorist in the United States... Martha Stewart becomes a hyper capitalist and she sells a lifestyle that is a complete illusion. It's a fiction: marshmallows and doilies and cupcakes. And she tells us how we should live. She tells us what we should buy. She tells us what colors we should paint our houses with."

Martinez is known as a provocateur. The Los Angeles-based artist began exhibiting work in the early 1980's, with attention-grabbing works like large, staged photographs of himself covered in wounds (applied by movie make-up artists) and a “mechanically animated sculpture of himself cutting his wrists with razor blades and laughing maniacally.”

Martinez's installation is one of many pieces of art on display in the new LACMA exhibition *HOME — So Different, So Appealing*. It's the inaugural show in Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, the Getty-sponsored citywide celebration of Latin American art unfolding over the next few months. The exhibition includes 40 U.S. Latino and Latin American artists and 97 artworks ranging from installations to an outdoor sculpture, conceptual art, paintings and other media, created between the late 1950s and the present.

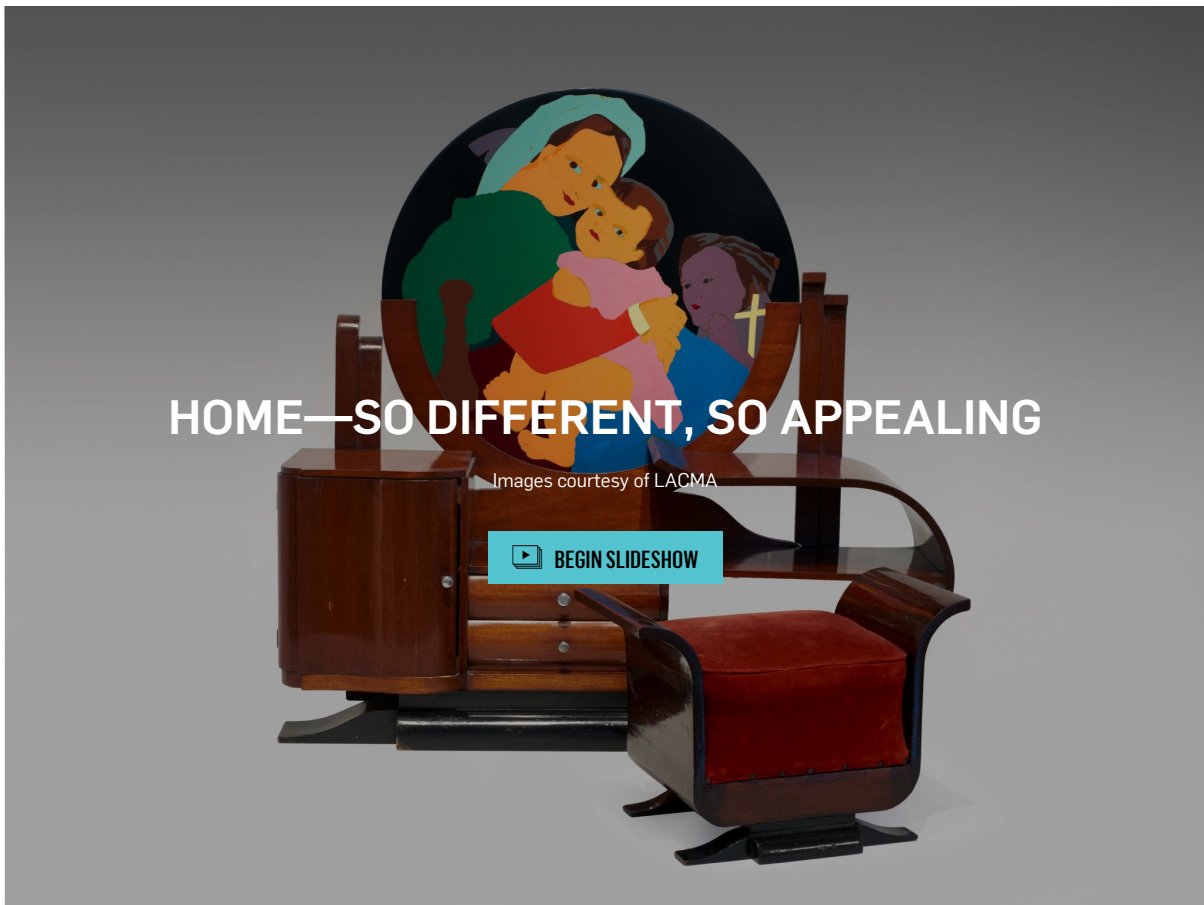
“We were looking at the ways in which artists are investigating this very deceptively simple idea to really talk about broader concerns within the hemisphere that range from socio-political issues to the private domestic space,” said co-curator Pilar Tompkins Rivas.



Artist Daniel Joseph Martinez stands in front of his LACMA installation “the west bank is missing, i am not dead, am i.” Photo by Avishay Artsy.

Another piece by Martinez marks the entrance to the exhibition. He's built two large aluminum wheels, around which are clear Vacuform panels, and carved into the panels are the names of twenty-two settlements in the West Bank that were modeled on planned communities developed in Irvine, California.

“The idea is using architecture as a weapon,” Martinez said. “And what's fascinating is that Israeli building of the settlements is a direct correlation to the United States in the 1940s. There was an experiment that took place in Irvine, Washington D.C., and Houston and these were the first cities that built tract housing. Tract housing then developed into the suburbs. The suburbs then developed into gated communities. What the Israelis did, which was quite brilliant, is they adopted the same technology in terms of the outline and they militarized the architecture. The settlements are not only places that people live but they are tools by which to occupy land and protect themselves simultaneously.”



The LACMA exhibition is divided into several categories, including model homes and the exporting of the American Dream of home ownership to other parts of the world. Another section features artists who take domestic furniture and spaces – such as mattresses, chairs and carpeting – and transform them into paintings and sculptures that reveal symbols of culture in a quasi-archaeological manner.

“Home is a concept that can be traced from the family, to the neighborhood, to the nation state, and larger questions of how do we talk about homeland? And it also has its counterpart which is non-home, or people that are displaced. We know that home is not a fixed idea. It’s something that we carry within us and it’s related to the people that we love. But it’s also something that that can shift or change and it can represent instability,” Rivas said.

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