

ARTS & BOOKS

VOID OF MISSING WORKS

ART, F5



A FABLED TRICKSTER SPINS TALE OF LIFE AND DEATH

BOOK REVIEW, F8



ART REVIEW



The t-shirt said ART can't hurt you, she knew better. Her problem was she placed a value on it. She believed in it just a little too much she wanted to believe that it was hers to have, to hold, and to own.

Visible 'Show' of force

BY LEAH OULMAN

In a photographic self-portrait from 1993, Laura Aguilar stands in front of an unidentified gallery, holding a cardboard sign that reads: "Artist - Will Work For 'Access.'" Aguilar had been making photographs for more than a decade by then, and she has mapped the rough terrain of her inner world and cataloged the faces of under-acknowledged communities.

Pictures filling two floors of the Vincent Price Art Museum attest to her persistence, to the unvarnished honesty of her inquiry — and to the institutional access she has earned.

The retrospective "Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell" is one of the revelations brought forth by "Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA." The exhibition — her first full survey — could serve as the PST poster child, so vividly does it fulfill the Getty initiative's mission to tell a broader, deeper version of L.A., Latino and Latin American art history by fleshing out the plot and diversifying its cast of characters.

The show is organized by independent curator Sybil Venegas (a former professor of Aguilar's at East Los Angeles College, where the museum is housed) in collaboration with the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. It includes more than 130 works, most of them black-and-white portraits of



Photographs by LAURA AGUILAR. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. LAURA AGUILAR'S portraits at the Vincent Price Art Museum confront identity and belonging. From top, "Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt (Part A)" from 1993 and 1984's "Los Illegals."

The camera democratized portraiture, making it affordable to those outside the traditional patron class. Aguilar pushes that process further by turning her lens toward photographically under-represented subjects like herself: Latina, lesbian, large-bodied.

Aguilar examines identity and belonging, the friction of feeling unworthy and the peace of recognizing self-acceptance. She captions a group of portraits of women (1986-90) with their thoughts on identifying as both lesbian and

unglamorized suburban present. On a hot day, she spreads her ample body beneath an open window, fan blowing directly on her, head drink resting on her thigh. The terms of comfort are hers; she is the very image of content self-containment.

Nudes posed in nature, as nature, follow. In these scenes of Aguilar sitting among boulders and lying beside pools of water, she enacts a primal sort of belonging, where she is continuous with the world rather than at odds with it, her shape and color as right as anything of the Earth.

In a 2007 video, Aguilar speaks to the camera about her struggles with depression, fear, self-doubt, the lack of touch in her life. She stands naked, literally and metaphorically, before a wall of stone, describing how her photographs help remind her of her own capacity and beauty. Photographs, especially those that make visible what usually goes unseen, have that kind of declarative, affirming power. Aguilar has worked hard, against the current, to land on these museum walls. We are the ones graced with access.

Vincent Price Art Museum, East Los Angeles College, 2301 Avenida Cesar Chavez, Monterey Park Through Feb. 20; closed Sundays and Mondays. (323) 265-4542, www.vincentpriceartmuseum.org

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5 PICKS

A Bard rivalry, a Sellars opera and more

A new month approaches and with it these five picks from our critics — promising productions and exhibitions to mark on the calendar:

'Chasing Mem'ries: A Different Kind of Musical'

The one and only Tyne Daly stars in a new musical with songs by Alan and Marilyn Bergman and a romantic story line that sounds at once wistful and heartening. Let's hope the show isn't schmaltzy. It opens Nov. 7 at the Geffen Playhouse in Westwood. (310) 208-5454, www.geffenplayhouse.org

— CHARLES MCNULTY

'Something Rotten!'

This backstage musical, set in the cutthroat theatrical world of Elizabethan London, follows the nutty schemes of two brothers tired of being caught in the shadow of that conceited upstart, William Shakespeare. The shtick, perfectly executed on Broadway, earned a Tony nomination for best musical. The national tour has two stops here: Nov. 7-29 at Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa. (714) 556-2787, www.scfra.org; and Nov. 25-Dec. 31 at the Ahmanson Theatre in L.A. (213) 972-4400, www.centertheatre.org

— CHARLES MCNULTY

'Refuse the Hour'

South African artist and opera director William Kentridge bases Philip Miller's opera on a vast installation work that includes gripping animation, startling choreography, unexpected music and a vision of the world that mixes science, philosophy, race, religion and socialism into a brew like no other. Presented by the Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA on Nov. 27-28 at Royce Hall. (310) 825-3281, www.ccp.ucla.edu

— MARK SWED

'Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici'

The art produced in Mexico in the century before the 1850 War of Independence reflects lavish complexities. More than 100 works here form the first full survey of 18th-century Mexican painting to be seen in an American museum. The show opens Nov. 19 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (323) 857-6000, www.lacma.org

— CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT

'Girls of the Golden West'

The most highly expected opera of the season is John Adams' California Gold Rush tale directed by Peter Sellars, who supplied the libretto. The San Francisco Opera production has faces familiar to L.A.: spectacular young singers in Julia Bullock and Davone Tines, and a conductor in Los Angeles Master Chorale music director Grant Gershon. Performances begin Nov. 23 at the San Francisco War Memorial & Performing Arts Center. (415) 864-3330, www.opera.com

— MARK SWED