
Angeleno Narratives in Autry's 'Hyphen'

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The Getty Center-sponsored Pacific Standard Time initiative, a collaboration between more than 60 art institutions across Southern California, celebrates the growth of Los Angeles' art scene and its establishment as a center of artistic innovation between 1945 and 1980.

The newest art exhibit at the Autry National Center in Griffith Park, "Art Along the Hyphen: The Mexican-American Generation," details the work of six Angeleno artists and the experiences of Mexican-Americans following the end of the second World War. The artwork exhibited addresses the social and political struggles that afflicted the Mexican-American community during the mid-twentieth century. It simultaneously encapsulates the development of Mexican heritage and culture blending with American artistic traditions. "Art Along the Hyphen" opened at the Autry Center on Oct. 14 and will run until Jan. 8, 2012.

Domingo Ulloa, one of the six artists featured at "Art Along the Hyphen," was born in Pomona but spent his formative years in Baja California. He used art specifically to call attention to the plight of marginalized communities in America.

"Racism/Incident at Little Rock" (1957) refers to the group of African-American students who were enrolled in a previously all-white high school in 1957, after the Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconstitutional.

The painting depicts six African-American students with books and school supplies enveloped by a formless crowd of screaming white-robed figures. The clearly defined, realistic figures of the black students are juxtaposed with the surrealist, blurred white figures that comprise the background, which helps to illuminate the struggle of young African Americans trying to achieve education against racism and adversity.

Another one of Ulloa's paintings, titled "Braceros" (1960), refers explicitly to the Bracero program in the 1940s, in which the Mexican and United States governments agreed to import temporary contract laborers from Mexico to the U.S. The painting depicts workers behind a fence, commenting on the substandard living conditions of these workers by visually showing humans being treated like cattle. Similarly to Ulloa, Roberto Chavez's artwork has political and social influences as well. "El Tamalito del Hoyo" (1959) is an oil painting of a young boy in front of a wall splattered with graffiti and a house surrounded by a white picket fence. The image acknowledges the often-ignored residents of Los Angeles' Mexican neighborhoods, which have frequently been neglected from the city's improvement efforts.

Another artist featured at the exhibit is Eduardo Carrillo, a native Angeleno. Religious influences and his Mexican heritage permeate Carrillo's work, which is exemplified in his large-scale art piece, "Las Tropicanas" from 1972-73. The colorful mural-esque painting demonstrates Carrillo's love of European traditionalists synthesized with his interest in pre-Columbian art. The artist utilizes symbols from Mexican history, including the Dia de los Muertos skeleton figures and an iguana, in this examination of his heritage.

Artists Dora de Larios and Hernando G. Villa also address their history and culture through art. Much of Villa's work focuses on a merging of Mexican and American traditions. For example, his oil painting "Untitled (Woman with White Mantilla)" (1945) re-imagines the traditional image of a World War II soldier's pin-up as a Spanish señorita.

De Larios has several sculptures at the exhibit, including a piece called "Milagros" (1984). It combines porcelain, stoneware, paint and other materials to create the figure of a woman, a sculptural personification of the Earth Mother ideal.

The individualization of "Art Along the Hyphen," using a focus on only six distinct artists, benefits the exhibit and allows a more personalized experience. Through a plethora of artistic mediums, including sculpture, mixed media and painting, the exhibition illustrates the contribution of Mexican-American artists to the Los Angeles artistic community.

