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Chicano Art 'L.A. Xicano' Exhibits Wrap a Banner Season for Chicano Art

By Abel Salas Wed., Mar. 7 2012 at 12:46 PM
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The outdoor balcony on the north end of UCLA's Haines Hall was a fitting place for the informal pizza party last week concluding a series of Pacific Standard Time exhibitions loosely gathered under the "L.A. Xicano" heading. The campus building houses the Chicano Studies Research Center as well as the brain trust behind the curatorial vision that spawned what The New York Times lauded as one of the most engaging aspects of the behemoth L.A. art survey represented by the ambitious PST project.

For UCLA professor Chon Noriega and his team of art historians-cum-curators, PST represented an opportunity to deshroud the historical record and posit the legacy of Mexican-American cultural and artistic production in this city as a viable, significant part of what makes L.A. an art capital.

Beginning last fall with "Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972-1987," a LACMA show that offered the first major look at the '80s conceptual and performance art collective that called itself "nausea" in Spanish, L.A.'s oft-overlooked Chicano art legacy is finally being acknowledged. While not an official "L.A. Xicano" or PST exhibition, the Asco exhibition foreshadowed what could best be described as a banner season for Chicano art, with about 80 artists exhibiting their work across L.A. in some of its most prestigious institutions.

A mid-winter opening night at the Fowler for "Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art



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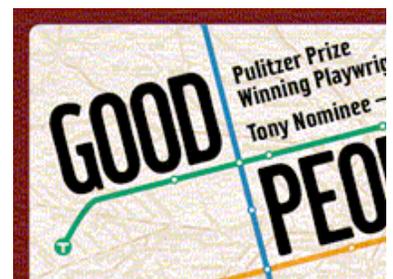
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Movement" -- a visual survey of Chicano art as a social, political and artistic force in LA -- and "Icons of the Invisible" -- a collection of images by photographer [Oscar Castillo](#) -- drew a crowd of over 1600 who sipped cocktails and heard a set by The Immaculate Conception, a side project from Grammy-nominated Ozomatli guitarist [Raul Pacheco](#) while lining up to see the actual exhibits.

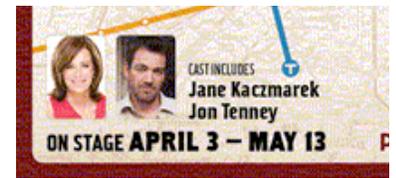
"Art Along the Hyphen, The Mexican-American Generation" at the Autry Center featured a pioneering group of artists who were creating world-caliber work decades before the civil rights movement of the '60s and '70s led to the ascendance of term "Chicano" among younger artists inspired by the political climate, and to some degree, the associated ethnic pride.

Beyond the exhibitions, "L.A. Xicano" also initiated panel discussions as well as a mural bus tour that went from the Fowler to LACMA for a look at "[Mural Remix](#)," the conceptual installation by Sandra de la Loza to a new mural site on the East Side. Creator of the situationist-style Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History, a faux historical society that uncovers the true history of monuments, de la Loza is heir to the Asco punk-meets-cholo, Neo-Dada aesthetic that confronts and subverts outmoded perceptions of Chicano art while challenging the status quo. Combining archival photos of familiar Chicano murals with experimental video and mixing it all together with liberal image sampling, she takes on stale notions of muralism, reconfiguring the way we look at murals by taking them apart and reassembling them as installation.

Accordingly, the tour terminated at the City Terrace alley where Asco co-founder [Willie Herrón](#) is painting a mural based on a photo of an Asco public performance from 1972 called "[Walking Mural](#)." Herrón, who also fronted legendary Eastside punk band Los Illegals, adapts a photo of Asco members wearing painted cardboard cutouts while walking along Whittier Blvd.

Fortunately, "L.A. Xicano" was equally informed by a vision that addressed the importance of contributions made by more strident artists and art collectives preceding Asco. Foremost among these were [Los Four](#) and [Los Streetscapers](#), both collectives comprised of muralists who were also formidable studio painters, artists such as Frank Romero, Judithe Hernandez, Magu, Wayne Healy and David Botello. They were bolstered by cultural spaces which sprang up on the East Side to facilitate a renaissance that continues today.

While "L.A. Xicano" came accompanied by a full-color, hard-cover catalog full of annotated essays, plus the requisite chichi receptions and loads of media hype, the sleeper jewel in the "L.A. Xicano" crown was the guided tour of the third floor interior murals and exterior ceramic tile murals by Jose "Joe" Gonzalez adorning East L.A.'s historic [El Mercado](#). A structure that occupies the corner of E. 1st St. and Indiana, the building is home to a remarkable set of picturesque Mexican landscapes that, depending on the lighting, shift from sunlit daytime scenes to night scenes. It is a hidden marvel most Angelenos will never know. In 1969, Gonzalez co-founded East L.A.'s Goez Art Studio & Gallery with his brother Juan Gonzalez and David Botello. It was the first gallery dedicated to what was then a brand new school of art denied entry elsewhere.



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Mi Padre, graphite on paper, 18" x 17," 2006 by Antonio Pelayo

Launch Gallery opened with a solo show by Antonio Pelayo, whose work Mi Padre is pictured here. The exhibit runs through March 17.

Poetically, one of the newest art spaces on Miracle Mile -- the Launch Gallery at 5900 Wilshire across the street from LACMA -- has chosen Antonio Pelayo, a young Chicano artist weaned on L.A. hip-hop, club and fashionista culture for its inaugural show. His collection of graphite drawings on paper is called "Mi Familia," and includes an extraordinary portrait of Biggie Smalls in addition to work from family snapshots taken in rural Mexico. They are rendered with sensitivity, love and an unparalleled skill. Chicano art has indeed come a long way. Forty-two years after Goetz, the art world west of La Brea is finally getting it.

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