

the La Peña newsletter

LATINO ARTS IN AUSTIN

Volume XI, No. 11

◆ Austin, Texas ◆

September, 2000

"Pobre México, pobre Estados Unidos, tan lejos de Dios, tan cerca el uno del otro." Carlos Fuentes



EVA (Portrait of my mother by Mirta Toledo)

JORGE COSCIA ◆ MUSIC FROM THE ANDES BY CHASKI ◆ POETRY BY VERÓNICA SANDOVAL

Toledo's TRACK OF FEELINGS

BY JOHN SINGLETON

There is a painting on my wall. There are oranges and reds and shards of yellow and bloody drops of purple. There are borders to these colors and there are fingerprints which wait like terracotta armies for the call to awaken, to be the hand again, to respond to something beyond these words. I have seen this. Again, it is upon my wall.

Elsewhere, there is a box, and in it rests countless worthless things. Rubbish of the sort only an idiot could love. Or God. It is not in my house, but south of there, past the sandy, smoldering borders and on, past the burning deserts where the camino real is no longer plagued by marauding. Comanches or the twice-bitten sons and hijas de Extremadura, past the circular ruins and the now-buried stonework of the ones who preceded the old ones, the ones who

gave us beautiful black etchings on our beans and rainbows like freckles on our corn.

Somewhere down there is a box where the words are kept, where the spots on the Jaguar are kept when not in use, where chronometers and sextants rust side-by-side with splinters of crystal and maps which attest to things we have lost and will not regain-Cibola, Quiviria, Iximche, Terra Incognita, Americae. There are marbles on which all the words in the world are scribbled, and petals from flowers that no longer grow. There is the dust of things we can no longer remember, which when tempered with certain pigments remind us of what we have forgotten. There is ice and mercury and blood.

Most of us have never seen this box, though others have described it for us. It is the box that holds the treasures of America, the Americas. It is the box where our memory is stored, where the languages we have lost

await a culture worthy of those beautiful sounds. In that box, Mirta Toledo stores her brushes. We see a Toledo painting, say for instance, a woman whose hair stands like stacks of August hay. We wonder from what or where Mirta has imagined this, but it is only because we have lost our way to the box where she stores her brushes.

In another painting, a young woman stands and she has feathers and in another a crow is speaking. We prefer to believe the

crows are birds and can't talk and thus the box remains shut. But the woman in Mirta's

continued on next page (second column)



Encounter

Acrylic on canvas, by Mirta Toledo
Fort Worth, 2000

continued from previous page

painting is receiving something from the crow. A joke. A curse. A blessing. Gossip. We don't know, because Mirta's paintbrushes are safe from us. Thank God. We might break them. Or copyright them. We might see them on television and forget that the raven haired girl can not understand this thing in our living room.

In another painting two boys stare at us from the same place, because God loves symmetry, and their green eyes run backwards to places we can only imagine because an artist like Mirta allows us to peak into the box, if only through another reflection. Her reflection. The reflection this time of a mom who has not lost but given.

The colors in her paintings do not blend, but bleed. There is orange and there is blue and the ugly compromises we must make, the shades of meaning where people equivocate and bury the past, these things are not there. The moldy blending of hue is traded for sharp contrast, clarity; the exact point where night and day play shell games is now captured, again, in a reflection of what has collected in the brushes of Mirta Toledo.

I am glad I do not have the box. So many touch break. I trust the box, and our histories to the gentle hands of painters like Mirta. They know how much we are ready for, and the reflections they give us are pieces of lineage, the contours of the leopard's spots, the ing care of the old box, this is enough for me. ■