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ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

## Chicano Art: It's Time for a New Aesthetic . . .

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William Wilson's review of "CARA: Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation" (Calendar, Sept. 12), currently on exhibit at the Wight Gallery at UCLA, once again demonstrates how art critics may often be put in the position of evaluating creative expression that might stand outside their own frames of reference.

The social and political functions of art are too readily dismissed by those critics who would rather keep art within a narrowly defined apolitical context. Wilson misses the point of the CARA exhibition: It is precisely to call into question entrenched standards and to force us to consider its own origin and creative context. CARA jars our sensibilities and makes us think of new, powerful criteria for evaluating "great" art and pushes us toward new conceptions of the term *American* .

While Wilson argues that there is a "traumatic disjuncture" between art and politics, in fact, the two often come together in spectacularly successful ways, as anyone who has seen Picasso's "Guernica" and Diego Rivera's murals can attest. It is a phenomenon of Euro-American art criticism that dictates that art must be divorced from its social context and must be "universal."

Rather than the traditional limited definition of "great art," truly great art should be defined as that which moves the viewer viscerally and visually.

"CARA: Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation" is a significant exhibition because it is an organic expression of a culture at a particular historical moment showing us the

form, content and process of a distinct style. At its very core is social commentary and collective creation. While remaining intensely personal, Chicano artists are committed to reflect, engage and illustrate a cultural experience unique to the United States during the 1960s and 1970s that represents a people born in this country but marginalized by a society resistant to defining itself as one born of many cultures.

Furthermore, the artists' ability to make use of materials from their immediate environment demystifies art and exemplifies the responsibility of the artist to create and comment on the world around him or her.

The "CARA" spirit of collective creation is seen in work by Los Four and ASCO of Los Angeles and the Royal Chicano Air Force of Sacramento. In these areas of the exhibition the individual artist is subordinated to a community aesthetic that acknowledges the artists' participation in society at large.

The historical roots of Chicano identity are vividly displayed by the "CARA" artists, as, for example in four studies of Emiliano Zapata. Emanuel Martinez's full-body image of Emiliano Zapata ("Tierra o Muerte") is silk-screened in black ink on the back of a manila folder. It hangs next to Rupert Garcia's own large silk-screen portrait of Zapata ("Emiliano Zapata"), a striking composition of eyes, mustache, and *bandoleros*. On the same wall is "The Man From Morelos," an oil on canvas by Alfredo Arreguin, a full-figure painting of Zapata in a complex mosaic of design that covers the canvas but draws out the figure of Zapata among the cornfields of his native state. "Zapata," by Jose Gamaliel Gonzalez, is an ink on paper portrait of the same icon. The power of these works stems from an equal combination of historical consciousness and artistic excellence.

Despite Wilson's misgivings, the Chicano art movement stands with such recognized movements as the Impressionists of the 19th Century and the Mexican muralists of the 20th Century, and it introduces a new aesthetic sensibility to the definition of American art. Just as important, "CARA" calls into question, in an exciting and revitalizing

manner, conventional notions of American art. That is what Wilson should want. It is exactly what you get with "CARA."