

What To Make Of Mexico City's Art Scene?

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Mexico City, circa 1990s: The art scene was blooming and bleeding-edge - and as complex and messy as those adjectives imply. Before the story is sanitized and boiled down to a simple chapter in an art-history tome, the Visual Arts Department of the University of California, San Diego is convening some of the scene's leading participants to argue alternative accounts.

The conference, "Mexico City in the 1990s: The Paint's Not Dry," begins at 9:30 a.m. on May 13, in the Seuss Room of Geisel Library, UCSD. Discussions are slated to run through 6 p.m.

The featured participants, all of whom played a part in the '90s Mexico City art scene and who continue to have a major role in the unfolding history, include:

Gerardo Estrada, coordinator of cultural diffusion at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and former minister of fine arts

Mexico's leading art critic Cuauhtémoc Medina, current (and, in 2002, the first) associate curator of Latin American art at London's Tate

Artist Rubén Ortiz-Torres, who was born in Mexico City, now lives in Los Angeles and teaches at UC San Diego

Yoshua Okon, artist and founding co-director of La Panadería, which was a key arts cross-roads space in Mexico City

Monica Manzutto, co-director of the internationally influential Kurimanzutto Gallery

Carmen Cuenca, co-director of inSite, a network of contemporary art programs and commissioned site-specific projects throughout the San Diego-Tijuana region, which helped redefine the relationship between Mexico City and its periphery.

Among the proposed topics are analyzing patterns of artistic interaction in the urban landscape of "D.F."; examining art collectives and informal gathering places; and chronicling Mexico City's fruitful links to the border region of Tijuana-San Diego and to L.A., New York and beyond.

"The 1990s in Mexico City were a period of tremendous political upheaval and incredible cultural energy. The art that grew out of that was socially interactive," said Steve Fagin, chair of the Visual Arts Department at UCSD and conference co-organizer. "Today, that art is internationally recognized. But does that mean it might lose its living spirit?"

"The goal of this conference," Fagin said, "is to take a breath before the art has become 'official, important art.' We want to recapture its undergroundness, its funkiness - and its politics."

The conference was organized by Fagin, Yoshua Okon, Roberto Tejada and Rubén Ortiz-Torres of the UCSD Visual Arts Department.

For more information: (858) 534-2860 or <http://www-apparitions.ucsd.edu/~visitors/>.

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