Eloy Torrez

Vamos a Jugar en las Ruinas

Let's Go Play in the Ruins

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The air is hot, the air is cool; the land is dusty-dry, there is water everywhere. These mysterious, contradictory elements are channelled metaphorically into Eloy Torrez's paintings as he explores experiences that pervade our daily lives and the uncertainty of personal identity. Their emotional associations illuminate his own psyche while bringing us to consider the depths of our own. His art touches multiple historical contexts, abstractly connecting us to the past as it brings us to reflect on enigmatic moments of life in the present. The theatrical and dramatic spaces in his paintings, with their disoriented or dreamlike perspectives in a not-so stable world, confuse the real and the fictional of our interior and exterior worlds. Those spaces and the various elements contained within them make direct references to events in Torrez's personal life: the landscapes of his early life in Albuquerque and urban Los Angeles, and destinations of his travels in Paris, Venice and elsewhere. Similarly, portrayals of the people around him, including those he has known intimately as well as astute observations of complete strangers, form his intensely personal expression.

What might seem on the surface to be ambivalence to national politics and ideologies or concepts of ethnicity, indigenism or multiculturalism, is deceptive. Torrez has not sidestepped these aspects or precluded a political stance in his art; a nationalistic sentiment is often present in a nuanced way. Although the directness of his political expression varies, the political and nationalistic projections of the preceding Chicano generation has fed into his motivations. He has worked within the Chicano art community, in a public forum with commissions in the community, as well as separate from it in private isolation.

Entrada Al Mundo Nuevo, 1991, design for a mural in St. Denis, France

All in all, the various experiences of Torrez's early life that fuel his imagination have generated a range of genres, themes and narratives at different stages of his career. As his personal style has evolved, Torrez has worked a mix of international ideas and national motifs into a combination of Realism, stylised Synthetism and Symbolism, Surrealism and Pop, and a nationalist Romantic vision. This exhibition presents a selection from this broad range of his art.

Part Two – The public face, the private struggle

Transformative presence in urban spaces

Across his oeuvre, Eloy Torrez's representations revel in the paradoxical. He invites us to celebrate the world around us but also involves us in an expanse of unsettling emotional experiences. While he reiterates various features, symbolic icons, and spiritual signals that reflect familiar aspects of his local culture, the narratives in his paintings resonate beyond the local, evoking universal themes. Torrez's observations of the existence of a varied range of protagonists: society's youth, friends, lovers, workers, people in ordinary, everyday situations, both domestic or in public places, are presented in two contradictory ways. One approach delves into private contexts, the intimacy of a marriage or a friendship experience, and concerns subjectivity, feelings, emotions and dramas of the human condition. In such works, he probes the depths of a surreal imaginary in peoples' disquieting unconscious relationships with the land, the environment, and each other. The second approach is a declaratory expression that signals art as a communal activity. These traditionally representative, celebratory, immediate portrayals represent the conscious recognition of a social expression. What connects these two strands in the body of Torrez's art is the power of emphatic detail in his recognition of the intricacies of the personalities and the expressions of experience in their faces. His art links the personal to the social realm.

Torrez invites us to celebrate our place in the world through a range of social themes in the numerous public art commissions he has completed since 1983. It might be assumed that among his works, these murals would least of all link his overlaid language of painting aesthetically to a metaphysical or spiritual expression. But Torrez has brought his own particular style and nuanced expression to the traditional Chicano art form of muralism. Even though the West Coast mural movement is highly celebrated, the history, civic importance, and the symbolic significance of muralism for the Chicano Movement is less well-known outside the Unites States of America. Despite its uniquely political and precarious history, and attempts to contain its development, the impact of the Chicano Mural Movement has not only endured to the present but has contributed to developments in public art. Eloy Torrez is among the many artists who have made the power and richness of the Chicano Mural movement continuous and contemporary.

In contrast to knowledge and understanding of this particular art form, a more generalised public notion of large scale, high-impact imagery has been typified as the mainstream phenomenon of the ubiquitous American billboard. One such example is the famous cigarette smoking, archetypal Texan cowboy, monumentally situated at the bend of Sunset Boulevard (at the corner Marmont Lane) from the early 1970s to 1999. Dominant in its dignified setting, this theatrical image functioned antithetically to Chicano muralism. The advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes with its