

ARTE Comes To Immigrant's Rescue

BY ALLAN APPEL | MAY 19, 2008 7:40 AM | PERMALINK | COMMENTS (2)



Allan Appel Photo: Young artist Andres Madariaga saw a fellow immigrant robbed and killed in Fair Haven. He saw his own muse falter thanks to his immigration status. Then ARTE found out about him.

Six works by Madariaga and five other artists — four from New Haven and two from Hartford — are featured in the third annual spring exhibition at ARTE, the pioneering Fair Haven-based gallery and Latino arts promotion organization.

In 2005 Madariaga was accepted at the prestigious Cooper Union in New York to pursue his dream, a visual arts career. Then his immigration status foreclosed on possibilities for applying for the scholarships necessary to attend. His creativity shut down. It might have stayed that way, with serious consequences, had not his teachers and ARTE invited him to show.

At the opening reception Friday night at ARTE's space on Grand at Front Street, 100 people turned out to celebrate, cut a rug downstairs with a few infectious merengues and boleros, and be introduced to these artists and their work.

In the case of Madariaga — no surprise — the travails of the new immigrant have become his most urgent recent subject. This oil on canvas is titled "Unknown." Madariaga said it was the first work he produced after a long year of painful, artistic silence.

"I saw an immigrant killed in front of my aunt's Laundromat at Perry and Lombard. Robbed for his money, and he died. I investigated him and the fate of others and how they've delivered to the morgue and their toes are tagged 'No Name.'"

Madariaga's portrait (at the top), which takes you inside a space that is mysteriously half flag-draped coffin already, and half freezer box at a morgue, shows the toe similarly tagged. In a panel at the base, he's



Madariaga, who came to the country at age 15 on a tourist visa from Colombia, and stayed on, said he feels caught between two cultures, at risk, and basically unknown by both sides, just as the figure in his painting is unknown.

His young artist's ambitions — "Eve," a work done in the Cooper Union summer program is pictured — are also complicated by the urgings of his family to follow more practical and remunerative pursuits, to get a leg up in the new land. That message collides with his artistic promptings.

"They support me," said Madariaga, who works a full time — yet, from a young immigrant's perspective, precarious — job at a cable company, "but my mother really doesn't get it."

He was directed to ARTE by his former Education Center for the Arts (ECA) teacher Johanna Breznick, who has encouraged his career. ARTE's founder Danny Diaz checked out his portfolio, and, six weeks later, here Madariaga was invited to join the show.

His story is a measure of the support that ARTE's founders, David Greco and Danny Diaz, give both to emerging and even established Latino artists, such as Marcelina Sierra. Her work (below), "Un negrito tan bueno que tiene el Corazon Blanco," plays, she said, on the phrase still commonly used in Puerto Rico as a compliment: "You are so good, it's as if you have a white heart."



Sierra, a graduate of the University of Hartford (in the photo with fellow ARTE exhibitor Marcos Colon, who showed digitally enhanced photo prints), runs an art school in Hartford called Guakia, which is a Taino word, she says, meaning "we." In her work the heart is made of paper and attached to the noble-looking negro with diaper pins. "The pins hurt," Sierra said, "and it should when we hear this phrase. The self-hating phrase should be eliminated from the language. If someone wants to say you're a wonderful guy, let's do so without this hurtful little tail added on."

The exhibition, which runs through June 15, is one of some 15 events ARTE is planning for the current season. Next up is "Progreso Latino," a photography exhibit on the history and achievements of Latinos across the state of Connecticut, which will run September 12 to October 18 in the atrium at City Hall.

Diaz said he hope the show would travel. Also traveling will be people who enroll in ARTE's annual road trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on October 18. Bringing Latino populations to art destinations they would not likely go to on their own is one of ARTE's aims.



As is the giving of scholarship to promising practitioners, and not only in the visual but all the arts. That's why the woodwind ensemble from John Daniels School, including award-winning soloists Kevin Lopez, on the left, Raymundo Morales, and their teacher John Miller, were also on hand to be heard and seen.

Miller's teaching and the kids' musical magic are funded by the Yale Class of '57 Music Education Project, which suggests music learning programs not only at John Daniels but throughout the city. Click here to learn more about that.

The Daniels clarinetists and company were here, however, as a kind of tryout as well. They intend to apply in November for one of ARTE's scholarships for materials, lessons, whatever is needed to advance careers in the arts for young Latinos, which is another aspect of ARTE's mission.

Last year, Danny Diaz said, ARTE awarded \$30,000 via the Progreso Latino Fund at the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven. This year the total will be more, and the Daniels ensemble, whose players are largely Hispanic, will be applying for support for private musical lessons, scores, and perhaps

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Will Andres Madariaga (here chatting with admirer and Board of Ed member

Carlos Torre) be applying for one of the scholarships? He wasn't sure, but he didn't think so. He continues to paint in the basement of where he lives, and he's paying his own way as an art student at Gateway Community College. He got a lot out of his system, he said, with "Unknown." His ambition is ultimately to become degreed as an art therapist.

The other three artists in the current exhibition are Carlos Hernandez-Chavez, Rafael Rios, and Felipe Molina. For a price list, the complete roster of ARTE's programs for the summer and fall and to learn more about the application process for scholarships, the contact is Danny Diaz at 787-2783. Share this story: digg / newsline / facebook