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¡Todos a Leer! at Librería Martínez

Also, the Karon Koron art exhibit

By Kat Avila | Web Published 6.25.2007

I picked up Spanish translations of the manga Tokyo Mew Mew and Rave, Mexican political cartoonist Rius's work Pequeño Rius Ilustrado, and Jose Luis Orozco's bilingual Corridos: Mexican & Chicano Ballads. I topped my small pile with a card of revolutionary soldadera Adelita (artwork by Aydee Lopez Martinez). A bilingual paper copy of Tio Rueben, The Reading Barber (or a Story About the Power of Reading) by Veronica Huacuja was free at Librería Martínez: Books and Art Gallery (<http://www.latinobooks.com>), which is where I was browsing.



Web latinola.com



Rueben Martinez is the owner of the 3,000-square-foot Santa Ana bookstore, as well as the adjacent Libros Para Niños space and a bookstore in Lynwood. I remember the smaller store he had years ago, more a barbershop with some bookshelves. In 2004, he won a MacArthur Fellowship (the "genius grant") for being a businessman and community activist who promoted reading.



"¡Todos a Leer!" cheers a giant sign outside the store. Librería Martínez is a comfortable oasis. Spanish-language books are not segregated but are integrated with the English-language books. The store also sells CDs, DVDs, and audio books. Along the top of the walls ran currently featured artwork by Mexican artist Vladimir Cora and his daughter Alica Cora.



Libros Para Niños next door is where children's storytime is held on Saturdays from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. The room is used for book signings and other functions as well.

There are upcoming book signings by two well-known Latina authors: Ana Castillo with The Guardians on Thursday, August 2, and Julia Alvarez with Once Upon a Quinceañera on Thursday, August 16.



I would have liked to have chatted more with bookseller Yancy, but it was time to zoom over to L.A. to catch the "Karon Koron: A Geta Art Exhibition" (held June 14-17) curated by graffiti/urban artist Galo "Make" Canote. Over sixty artists from Los Angeles, Japan, and Mexico jammed the day before over traditional Japanese wooden clogs and turned them into art collectibles. I wanted to see the results of the party.



Unfortunately, I set off too late that Friday afternoon and ended up scratching the trip to Melt Gallery at Meltdown Comics ("Largest Comic Book Store on the West Coast") in West Hollywood. I e-mailed the curator to see what I missed.

"I am sorry to hear you missed the show," wrote Galo. "The show was truly amazing. Here is a quick link to some photos of the show in the LA Weekly: http://www.laweekly.com/index.php?option=com_slideshow&type=1&gallery=355&Itemid=565

"Why geta? Because I wanted to highlight Japanese craftsmanship, its art and its culture, while combining it with the culture and elements I mainly find myself in or surround myself in. I wanted to do something unique, and the getas were an object I felt was most representative of Japan.

"My involvement was - I am the curator/organizer of the show, the one who selected and rounded up all the artists, the one who solicited all the sponsors (Yaegaki Sake, Redbull, Asahi Beer, Calpico, Itoen, PopKiller, etc.) I am the one who hung the show, the one who promoted the show, the one who had the idea of the show, the one who pretty much put the show together. The gallery, Melt Gallery, also greatly contributed with support. Artists such as Sergio Robleto, Mandoe-MAK, Alex Kizu also helped out a lot.

"To answer your question about how I consider myself. I refuse to state what I consider myself. I just consider myself an L.A. Native. But, if I had to answer your question, I'd say that I am L.A.-born with a Mexican heart, a Japanese spirit, and a global mind."

To learn more about Galo "Make" Canote and his live performance art, surf over to his Web site at <http://www.makeone.org>. Run your mouse over the individual letters in the "Make One" banner to get the menu. It's life on the spray-can art side of L.A.

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