

BUSCANDO

A newsletter on Chicano and U.S. Latino theatre in the Southland.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

It's Spring! The swallows have come back to Mission San Juan Capistrano (though the only swallow I saw on St. Joseph's Day, March 19, at the mission was some guy in a bird costume). A treat this year was the unusually large migration (the largest since 1974) of painted-lady butterflies that blanketed the area on April 2.

I was reminded of those butterflies as I watched the Univ. of Calif., Irvine, Ballet Folklórico troupe dance at the Fiesta Latina at Saddleback College on April 4. The women in their bright colorful dresses gracefully swishing this way and that way resembled butterflies on the wing. Later, I chatted with member Victor Torres, who somehow manages to find time to dance while preparing for his orals in Anthropology. He said the UCI troupe was 25-strong, and that they have an instructor who visits UCI once a week to work with them. Eventually they hope there will be a permanent instructor in the UCI Dance Dept.

People have been asking how to get on the mailing list for Buscando California. Just send your name and address. A small donation is always appreciated, as this publication is supported by private funds. If you publish a newsletter as well, let's trade.

I would like to thank Maria Teresa Marrero at the Univ. of Houston for the Arte Público Press newsletters, and Jorge Huerta at UCSD for letting me forage through his filing cabinets. Muchas gracias also to Louie Olivos, Jr., for the comp ticket to his bilingual play Was Mexico! on March 1.

THE BILINGUAL FOUNDATION OF THE ARTS
My Visits With MUM (MY GRANDMOTHER MARTA)
Changed from May 5-June 13 to May 19-June 7,
from SFA to Los Angeles Theatre Center, /3.

March

Edward James Olmos' American Me opens in movie theatres nationwide. The movie is brutal, real, and provocative. But don't miss it!

Feb. 29-March 1

Was Mexico!, by Louie Olivos, Jr., RANCHO SANTIAGO COLLEGE, SANTA ANA. This outdoor production was hampered by bad weather conditions. The Los Angeles-based Kipe Totec Aztec dancers were entertaining.

March 4

Culture Clash--Richard Montoya, Herbert Siquenza, and Ric Salinas--in A Bowl of Beans on PBS. Last summer their show enjoyed an extended run at the Los Angeles Theatre Center, but their TV sitcom for Fox never made it out of the gates.

March 6-7

Teatro Alto--San Diego State Mechistas--do Carlos Morton's El Jardín and Luis Valdez's Los Vendidos. CENTRO CULTURAL DE LA RAZA, SAN DIEGO.

March 6-7

"SPEAK FOR MYSELF: Mexicana, Chicana, Latina Filmmaking" Conference, UNIV. OF CALIF., IRVINE. The conference included speakers, and screenings with commentary and discussion with the audience by several notable filmmakers, such as Sylvia Morales, Nutilde Landeta, Lourdes Portillo, Frances Salome España, Ela Troyano, and Marcela Fernandez Violante.

March 19

Ruby Nelda Perez in Women's Work, SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE, SAN DIEGO.

March 20-21

Perez, CENTRO CULTURAL DE LA RAZA. Also conducted an acting workshop.

March 20-22

El Teatro Campesino does Josefina Lopez's Simply Maria and Evelina Fernandez's How Else Am I Supposed to Know I'm Still Alive. Both works were written and directed by Chicanas. The San Diego production, at the EDUCATIONAL CULTURAL COMPLEX, was co-sponsored by Mascara Magica. Earlier, March 3-7, El Teatro Campesino was in Los Angeles at the Japan American Theatre. This is the teatro's first tour in 12 years. The play co-produced with Simply Maria changes, depending on the venue.

April 15-19

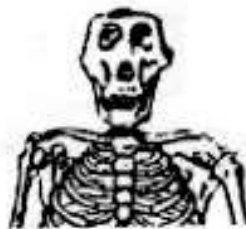
Federico Garcia Lorca's Yerma, WANDELL WEISS FORUM, UCSD.

April 23

El Teatro de la Esperanza does Real Women Have Curves, MANDEVILLE AUDITORIUM, UCSD.

April 28-May 2

"Latin American Theatre Today: History, Gender, Genre, Performance" Conference, UNIV. OF KANSAS.



THE YEAR OF THE WHITE BEAR: TAKE ONE

THINGS TO DO IF YOU
ENCOUNTER AN ABORIGINE
1. Do not panic

Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's The Year of the White Bear: Take One opened to the public March 2-4 at the Fine Arts Gallery, University of California, Irvine (UCI). Performance artist Gómez-Peña in his Aztec high-tech get-up and writer-curator Fusco in a bikini top, grass skirt, and "Ms. Discovery 1492" sash posed as aborigines from the newly discovered Caribbean island Guatinau and allowed themselves to be locked up in a cage for display and propaganda purposes. On the nights of March 3 and 4, the aborigines were temporarily freed from their cage for performances on a concrete slab outside the gallery. The ritualistic performances were conducted around a fire in a steel drum. They constituted part of an ongoing project called "A Performance Chronicle of the Rediscovery of America by the Warrior for Gringoostroika" and included an historical overview of the censorship of the "other" in the Americas by religious, government, and art institutions. The performance art event was the culmination of a UCI residency for Gómez-Peña and Fusco which had started Feb. 24. The Gringoostroika project is expected to continue in the U.S. and abroad in opposition to the quincentennial celebration of Christopher Columbus' arrival in America.

As visitors strolled into the gallery, they were greeted by a uniformed zookeeper who distributed advice and brochures with tips on what to do if one should bump into an aborigine. On the wall behind the guard was a bright orange road sign with the word "CAUTION" in black under a silhouette of a running male and female aborigine, reminiscent of the signs California drivers see as they approach the I.N.S. checkpoint at San Onofre, over 50 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, a zone where a number of Mexican nationals have been run over and killed trying to avoid the border patrol. On the right side of the gallery entranceway was an aborigine souvenir stand stocked with plastic-bagged, tongue-in-cheek items such as aborigine breath freshener (a clove of garlic) and fossilized bones (dog milkbones). Ironically, on the opposite side of the lobby, as if looking at the origin of a funhouse mirror image, was the gallery gift shop selling the usual art postcards, books, and jewelry. The result was the creation of a provocative space between the gallery gift shop and the aborigine souvenir stand, the authentic and the inauthentic, the parodied and the parody, the real and the imaginary, and the elitist and the plebeian.

To peruse the aborigine souvenirs was to become aware that one was plugging into a set of cultural, as well as tourist, practices that has encouraged the exploitation, commodification, and consequently, debasement of indigenous cultures for commercial profit. For some, the experience of the "other" becomes something as easily acquired as a new jacket or pair of shoes. One could buy and consume difference in this way and feel satisfied that one had sufficiently interacted with a particular community.

After passing the zookeeper, visitors then proceeded to a room whose white walls were covered with blowups of letters related to the event concerning fire safety and human waste disposal. (In the end, it was decided that the performance artists would be escorted to the restroom.) There was a video monitor that sat eye-level on a white square pedestal. The label beneath the monitor read "The Aboriginal Homeland". Images on the screen looked like old Hollywood with pale native women in bikini tops and grass skirts happily whiling away their time on some faraway romantic tropical island.

In the next gallery room was a giant cage. Inside the cage were Gómez-Peña and Fusco. Visitors could walk around the cage and observe them from all four sides. The cage was furnished with a TV, a laptop computer, a hammock, knickknacks, and baby dolls, among other things. A neon CERVEZA/BUDWEISER sign hung from the bars. Outside, another zookeeper vigilantly stood guard to protect the visitors from the aborigines. In front of the cage was information about the aborigines and their homeland, as well as a listing of "Special Aborigine Spectacles for Visitors". An authentic song or dance could be had for 50 cents. For a dollar, a visitor could hear storytelling in the aboriginal tongue or get a polaroid picture taken with the aborigines. At one time, a UCI video class was in the room taping. A character named Ralph Bland from Near-Geographic was busy interviewing the aborigines through the zookeeper (UCI student Eric Senkbeil). The zookeeper would translate the questions into Spanish, and Gómez-Peña would reply back in Spanish to the zookeeper who would translate the answer into English. Watching the interaction, one could see multiple cages produce themselves--the cage of language that separates people from one another, the cage constructed by publications such as National Geographic marking the indigenous as exotic, the cage created by tourist industries surrounding the indigenous so that they have become a source of spectacle and entertainment, and so on.

TIPS: SAFE
SECURITY
ABORIGINE

The male specimen, El Aztec High Tech, as you can see is very healthy. He would be a great asset to our labor force.

We named our female aborigine Miss Discovery 1492, she is small boned, thus we have a threat of her reproducing.

One gallery visitor expressed her discomfort to the artists at seeing them locked up. She concluded that that was the whole purpose of the event and that it had succeeded in this respect. Other visitors, Anglo and minority, walked out as quickly as they had come in missing the board opposite the cage. The board was titled "A Message from the Embassy of Guatinsau in the U.S.A." It listed examples of indigenous peoples, starting from 1493, who had been put on display in Europe and in circuses. Between the board and the cage, another space was created for thinking about the event. There were the contradictions to be resolved between reading the message from Guatinsau criticizing the West for its display practices of indigenous peoples and the aborigines who had consented to be locked up for three days to be ogled at. The aborigines had demanded to be discovered by the West. Since civilization had not come to them, they had come to civilization, reminding one of the many indigenous peoples who had never asked to be "discovered".

Viewing the aborigines, it was difficult not to get caught up by the energy of the crowd as everyone pressed forward maneuvering for a better look. What other strange things would the aborigines do next? Gómez-Peña and Fusco watched the crowd from behind sunglasses, no doubt as much amused by the antics of the crowd as people were by them.

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S



UCI art history student Fran Carrillo holds up one of the aborigine souvenirs visitors could buy and take home with them.



Gómez-Peña and Fusco demonstrate for the crowd aborigine caretaking skills with baby dolls.

7. They also enjoy polaroid pictures.

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MALINCHE



NOTE: The following edited text was written and performed by Herlinda Sullivan on Feb. 5 for a Toastmasters meeting of the Winners Club, no. 4244, in Santa Ana. It was the final assignment, "Bringing History to Life," in the storytelling manual of the Toastmasters Advanced Communication & Leadership Program. She received a Best Speaker ribbon for her performance.

I am not a traitor to my people. History has done an injustice judging me as a traitor.

I was a captive of the conqueror Hernán Cortés. I went everywhere with him. I was his interpreter, and I also became his advisor in Indian affairs. My Indian name is Malinche, but later I was baptized by the Spaniards as Marina. I had to travel to the present time to correct many misconceptions regarding my life.

My father was an important chief in the town of Paynala, Mexico. My mother was a beautiful and talented maiden from another town. When my father first saw her, he fell in love with her and, contrary to our custom, he married an "outsider". I was the first born and a disappointment to my mother because she had wanted to present my father with a male heir. But my father never made me feel that I was less important to him because I was only a female. He was proud of me, and I was educated to succeed him as ruler. My teachers were the tribe's high priests and medicine men. They found that I had a natural ability to learn other languages

Tragically for me, my father died when I was only 12 years old. Under pressure from the priests and medicine men, my mother married my father's brother. Finally, she produced a male heir. Soon after my half brother was born, I was sold by my mother to some traveling merchants. They also bought 19 other young girls to be sold as slaves. We were all taken to Tabasco in the south of the country as merchandise.

I was living in a small village near Tabasco when some foreigners arrived. They were different and resembled the blonde blue-eyed gods of our legends. They were taller than the Indians and had some large animals that we had never seen. Their leader was Hernán Cortés. As the legend had predicted, they came from the sea. The Indians were very frightened of them and decided to give them presents of gold and slaves to appease them. I was among the 20 girls given to them. Soon I found out they were only human, different coloring and taller, but, nevertheless, man.

Because I spoke several languages I was selected by Hernán Cortés to be an interpreter. He had Catholic priests that spoke some of the local languages, but I was more useful because I also knew the local customs. In a very short time I learned Spanish and became a valued interpreter and advisor to Cortés. It is true that I traveled all over the country and saw many battles during the conquest of Mexico, but it is also true that whenever possible I mediated and gained leniency for the Indians

I fell in love with Cortés and we had a son, but he could not marry me because he was already married. But he acknowledged our son and gave him land and an important place in our colony.

Years later, Cortés allowed me to return to my hometown and take my rightful place as a ruler. I found my mother and confronted her with her terrible deed. Can you imagine my surprise when through tears and sobs my mother told me that she sent me away to save my life? She said to me, "I did not betray you. The grand priest wanted to kill you so that your brother could become the ruler. When your friend--the slave Ato--died, I pretended that you were dead and sent you away as Ato the slave. I knew that your beauty and intelligence could find you a good place in society and keep you alive."

So you see I am not a traitor.

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Don't miss Latins Anonymous at South Coast Repertory in Orange County! Show opens June 18! SCR subscribers can purchase tickets now; rest of the tickets go on sale May 5.