

NAHUI OLLIN

The work of

Andrés Cisneros-Galindo

ESSAYS BY:

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Nahui Ollin, Prognostications / Rituals of Time

Yadira Cazares

Artist Andrés Cisneros-Galindo (b.1947) titled his art exhibition *Nahui Ollin* or Four Movement, a sacred day in the 260 Meso-American calendar that alludes to the cyclical movement of nature in respects to the four directions. *Nahui Ollin* is also the name of the current Sun-God era in Aztec/Mixtec cosmology, also a ritual of time. It's an important symbol to have named this collection of works, a metaphoric lighthouse of knowledge in the fog of current world wide events.

Nahui Ollin presents a collection of works that reveals Death inextricably connected to Life, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end all at once. Although current artistic merits have been hijacked by the advent of NFT's, crypto-currencies, and avatar artists, one could argue that these concepts are interchangeable and the similarities between alchemy and technology are incredulously nuanced. *Mictlan* (1995) looks like a premonition, the hovering structures appear like a motherboard, or micro-chip, pathways to receive electrical current, similar to mechanical drawings. Andrés explains that the reason the figures appear mechanical is because they are recovered memories, through channeling, confiding that our ancestors intended on prognosticating, to express their importance and their knowledge.

The epic triptych, *Coatl* (2020-2023) crowns the space in all its earthly glory while being the youngest painting in the selection without needing to impose deeper meanings, to the already poetic. The triptych is a fast moving narration of biblical means, silhouettes of humans drawn in a rhythmic dance, seemingly rebirthed out of the coil of a feathered serpent, a subliminal altar of faith. The imagery easily feels like an excavation on an archeological site, every biomorphic shape a treasure strewn along a vast explosion of paint.

El Mozote (1994) which brings to the foreground the Mozote Massacre of 1981 in El Salvador is an example of Andres' familiar style, yet he considers it a crossroad painting that signifies an expansion of his perceived existence. He explains it as a nightmare, born out of images he had seen in the news. Months of layered oil paints cradling bones, skulls, limbs, with overt reds enunciating death, burial, or a funeral procession on canvas.

Migration (year unknown) is possibly the most precise visual series of collagraphs created in the style of stop motion animation. It insinuates the Darwinian graphs of Man being a younger iteration of Apes. The collagraphs lined up together expel any difference that would otherwise render one human life superior to another and yet it also clearly identifies the pattern of brutal regimes of men that rule by violence and death as they progress through the series, one less bone at a time.

Over the years I have seen Andres work in his studio for several energetic hours at a time, and I have witnessed how the details of his creative language are as extraordinary as a magician or sorcerer in a popular science fiction movie. At any given moment he is carving up a nightmare on a piece of wood with the precision of a plastic surgeon. These experiences of Andres in his daily life have influenced my understanding of his visual codices. I share the truth of a man and his work, not devoid of tribulations, drudgery or limitations. Demons and shadows abound and yet his honesty at the travesty of being fallible, fuels his creative work into the amalgamation of ancestral knowledge in expansive movement.

Yadira Cazares is a multidisciplinary artist, gallerist and writer currently writing a memoir and working on a painting series that explores how technology has affected visual artists. yadiracazares.com

Art Makes You Human

Pam Martin

"...art making..... it's a continuous process of learning and relearning and inventing.... inventing is the whole thing."

- Andrés Cisneros-Galindo

When Roberto called and asked if I would write an essay about Andres' work as an artist educator, teacher and mentor, from a NIAD perspective, my response was an unequivocal yes. Yes, because "Art makes you human...it is a path to find happiness. And at NIAD it is a joy because it is a process." Those were Andres' words from a StoryCorps interview in 2016.

For nearly forty years Andrés Cisneros-Galindo has worked at NIAD. Managing the studio and facilitating numerous processes of art making in what he said is a give and take - a continuous process of learning. In this continuous process we have freedom and a way to gain confidence in the work and in life. There is the possibility to loosen-up, liberate oneself, to find balance and joy.

When he said inventing, it made me think about how that actually happens inside any artist. The way our thoughts and feelings get expressed outward, and form the work. Andrés proceeds with respecting each person, looking for what they are attracted to and following that path to prepare a space - their space for what may unfold and open with their particular creative process. Paints, brushes, canvas, pastels, paper, ink, stylus, nibs, brayers, linoleum squares and the press. Working at the task of tooling an area of tables or a wall which is itself an invitation to join him as he engages the space. Quiet, unobtrusive, almost under the radar, he maintains a steady presence. What he calls setting the stage, preparing a place at the table... rolling ink, turning the press wheel, pulling the print... you follow the artist.

Always aware of subtle details from numerous angles - Andrés takes a holistic approach that also considers life problems. He makes tea. And turkey soup. These things are connected. Art is a powerful tool of survival both personally and as a group effort... it is keeping your sanity, how to behave with other people, learning from others, and how to dismiss difficult tense situations with humor.

I have watched him whittle bamboo shoots into calligraphy pens, bake sweet potatoes and prepare all the paints for a collaborative mural project, having just pulled numerous linoleum cut prints with several artists working in his section of the studio. This and much more he has choreographed on any given day before lunch.

In the words of facilitator Chelsea Smith, *Andrés is very serious about the work without taking himself seriously at all.*

Cold winter mornings turning on the lights, grinding the coffee and pulling out a bag of warm tamales at the kitchen table before the buses arrive, Andres is the living embodiment of what it means to be in the house and inventing.

A job, a direction, a necessity - his example, of what art can be in our lives, is a gift.

Pam Martin is a current board member at NIAD. She also worked as a NIAD Facilitator from 2012 to 2018.

Andrés Cisneros-Galindo

Simon Kenrick

Andres's art grows out of a world of divisions - spiritual, cultural, political, geographical... His is an open-ended journey that both opposes them and sets out to heal them in a search for wholeness. The world he lives in includes the polluted air of the Richmond Chevron refinery and the still inspiring history of the Chicano Movement, as well as the ancient indigenous spirits of the Americas who are continually reimagined in his art - an art committed to a global theme in our postcolonial world: the decolonization of consciousness.

With so many dimensions, this world has called forth through him an almost endless array of symbolic images and technical inventions, from Quetzalcoatl and Calaveras to the discarded flotsam and jetsam of the Richmond flatlands, reassembled in the 80s as new totemic forms. The principle of assemblage, seemingly haphazard, also stands for the process of reconstructing social identities from disparate available sources: the cultural history reclaimed by the Movement, the alienating fragments offered by the dominant culture, and the inspiration gained in the struggle against them. Another key thread - migration - accounts for no less than sixteen images in this show.

These threads are woven through Andres' art and social practice: working, for instance, in the 1960s community printshop and newspaper monitoring collective COMEXAS in Oakland with Malaquias Montoya; in the solidarity work of the Third World Alliance at San Francisco State University in 1968; in the 1970s movement-generated education and health institutions of the East Bay like El Centro Infantil, La Escuelita and La Clinica de la Raza; as co-founder with Malaquias, Simon Kenrick and Nadja Lazansky of the Taller sin Fronteras (Studio without Borders) in the mid-80s, and then, starting in the 80s and crucial to this exhibit, a decades-long commitment

to NIAD - itself another dimension in the struggle against fractured identities - in this case the demeaning stereotypes imposed on artists with disabilities.

Much of this is an art of struggle, but it is also an art of celebration, solidarity and healing entwined with life forces that are so often dismissed or denied in the reckless exploitation of the earth's resources. These forces, and the traditions which represent them, have steadfastly refused the despoliation of the earth. Instead they have offered sustenance and solace in the face of the capitalist compulsion for self-destruction.

In the work of Andres and so many of his peers we see a continuing allegiance to a generations-long anti-colonial struggle, which is still asking questions about what liberation might actually mean where the world of the spirit is routinely denied.

His recent work not only harks back to the totemic images of the 80s, but sustains the flowing spiritual streams which give them context and meaning. Intense color contrasts - intense enough to appear multi-dimensional - draw us into interior worlds where the struggle for decolonization involves reconciliation with parts of the self previously alienated by the colonizer.

Simon is an English art historian and graphic artist who came to California in 1982 and never left. He worked as a printmaker at Mission Grafica in SF's Mission Cultural Center, and co-founded Taller sin Fronteras in 1985 with Malaquias Montoya and Andres Cisneros. He spent twenty years in LA at grad school and teaching art history, returning to the Bay Area in 2019 to be closer to family and friends.



Nahui Ollin: The work of Andrés Cisneros-Galindo

Exhibition: June 28 – November 16, 2023

Reception: Saturday, July 15, 12pm-2pm

Print Demo: Saturday, July 29, 2pm-3:30pm

Artist Panel Talk: Saturday, August 19, 12pm-1:30pm

Gallery Hours: Wednesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm

Richmond Art Center, 2540 Barrett Avenue, Richmond, CA 94804