



HABLAMOS JUNTOS together we speak

Amalia Mesa Bains

Artwork featured in Hablamos Juntos is: New World Wunderkammer

Medium: Installation

Dimensions: 10 ft x 30 ft x 5 ft

Description: *This work is in the tradition of Cabinet of Curiosities of the 18th century. It presents artifacts from the Americas, the Spanish and African sources which are part of the mixing of races in the New World.*

1. *Let's get personal. Tell us about your artwork and the importance of Chicano/a artists as role-models. What education and skills are needed for an art career?*

- *My cultural heritage is Mexican and I came of age in the early Chicana/o Movement*
- *I was encouraged by or mentored by Yolanda Garfias Woo, the weaver and educator. My education/training included a BA in painting and a Masters in interdisciplinary education, another Masters in Psychology as well as a Ph. D. in Clinical Psychology.*
- *What were/are your major influences? I have been influenced by my cultural heritage, the baroque, global arts, textiles and my family history*
- *How old were you when you started your artwork? I began drawing at 5 years old and studied art all through school. My first major work began in 1966 in the San Francisco Phelan Awards exhibition. I knew I was an artist all my life.*
- *What was the reason you started creating art? I began creating art because it was the most exciting way to express myself. I turned to art when I felt that I wanted things to be different- it has always been a way to reimagine life. The dramatic experience that made my art have even more meaning to me was closely linked to history, politics and to death. The*

traditions of the Day of the Dead were a way to bring these concerns into one form.

- *I would tell young artists to build community and to gain all the skills they can so they have all the possible options to approach their work and I would encourage them to become informed on the issues of their time.*
- *When did you make your first sale of your artwork? My first sale was in the 19602 when I won a prize in n art contest in Western Washington State in 1966, but I did not make art to sell for almost 20 years as I was concerned with community based art communities that saw art as a tool for developing historical consciousness*
- *Short – one paragraph bio*
- *Amalia Mesa-Bains is an artist, educator and cultural critic. Her artworks, primarily interpretations of traditional Chicano altars, resonate both in contemporary formal terms and in their ties to her Chicano community and history. She has exhibited widely including Los Angels County Museum of Art , the Whitney Museum of American Art at Phillip Morris, Museo del Barrio, National Museum of Art, Smithsonian, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and others. She has pioneered the documentation and interpretation of Chicano traditions in Mexican-American art and is a leader in the field of community arts and education. Among her many awards is the distinguished MacArthur Fellowship. She is Professor Emerita in the Visual and Public Art department at California State University at Monterey Bay.*

2. Looking at the broader picture, can you help students develop visual literacy of artworks presented, develop their critical thinking, and creativity?

- *Describe your art medium? I work in installation art primarily which is a three-dimensional art form that transforms spaces through sculpture and mixed media techniques. I use this medium because it allows me to integrate all my interests and skills in telling a story in three-dimension.*
- *I made the New World Wunderkammer by working with the collection at the Fowler Museum at UCLA and designing a cabinet to hold the objects and integrating my own family images and my own objects while also developing 8 digital prints reflecting the cultural narratives attached to the artifacts.*
- *What is the intent of the work? I hope to open the mind of the audience to consider diverse histories of the Americas within a spiritual and aesthetic context. How is your art a way to tell your story? I make art that illuminates the American story in all its diversity and particularly as it concerns Latino culture. I often use the story of my only family to approach issues of culture and social justice.*
- *Your artwork creates a dialogue with the student as they relate to and interact with your work. How could a viewer look more closely at the*

details of your work? *Installations can be viewed in the macrocosm as narrative or story telling sites and also in the microcosm as small vignettes and in details of meaning within the larger site.* How could he/she be more intimately involved with your artwork? *My artwork has details of history and nature that could be used as a source for research, writing and discussion such as Mesoamerican arts, Mexican history, the era of slavery and folk art traditions.*

- What would you like them to experience and notice? *I would like them to sense the complexity the Cabinet has to offer as a statement about the **mestizaje** or mixing of cultures in the Americas.* What (unique) skills have you developed as an artist? *I have developed the ability to create narrative elements within my installations through modifying existing furniture, building objects and integrating my writings, my scholarship of cultural history, my family history and my concern for social justice.*
- How do you think art impacts our culture? *I hope that my art helps people to see the complexity of their society and that it brings out their curiosity and even their sense of social justice.*

Thank you for contributing to this exciting and important journey with us.