A project by Amalia Mesa-Bains (b. 1943, Santa Clara, CA) on the occasion of the Fowler Museum’s Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations.
Art selected from the Fowler Museum’s holdings.
Installation photography by Joshua White/JWpictures.com
© 2013 Fowler Museum at UCLA

Contemporary Latin@ Broadsides Project
Museo Eduardo Carrillo & Pajaro Valley Arts
Supported by the City of Santa Cruz
Let’s Get Personal

Cultural Heritage: My cultural heritage is Mexican and I came of age in the early Chicana/o Movement. 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.

Mentored by: I was encouraged by or mentored by Yolanda Garfias Woo, the weaver and educator.

Education/Training: 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.

Influences: I have been influenced by my cultural heritage, the baroque, global arts, textiles and my family history

Tell Young Artists: 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.

Here’s the Artwork

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.

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. 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. I integrated my own family images and objects while also developing 8 digital prints reflecting the cultural narratives attached to the artifacts.

Unique skills: 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.

Art Impacts Life: 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 experiences that made my art have even more meaning to me were closely linked to history, to politics and to death. The traditions of the Day of the Dead were a way to bring these concerns into one form. 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 own family to approach issues of culture and social justice.

Let’s Look Closely

Look: What do the objects in the Cabinet offer as a statement about the experience of mestizaje or mixing of cultures in the Americas?

Notice: The complexity of the details of history and nature found in the installation. Are there objects that surprise you?

Discuss: Consider Mesoamerican arts, Mexican history, the era of slavery and folk art traditions. Amalia’s installations can be viewed as narrative or story telling sites. What “details of meaning ” are found here?

Get a Fuller Picture

A note from the Artist: I want people to see the complexity of their society and that it brings out their curiosity and even their sense of social justice.

For the full transcript visit http://museoeduardocarrillo.org/ http://www.pajarovalleyartscouncil.org/