Sana sana colita de rana. Dame un besito para hoy y mañana.

Sana Sana Colita de Rana
Artists Influenced by La Cultura

Curated by Ricky Armendariz
October 2 – 26, 2008

Francisco Delgado
Los Supersonicos
Carlos Fresquez & Francisco Zamora
Donna Huanca
Ian Tyler Ibarra
Haydée Victoria Suescum
Kathleen Trenchard

Copyright © 2008 by The University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form by any means without written permission of the artist or publishers.
Like others, I find that the blend of contemporary and traditional aesthetics and the ongoing cultural negotiation among Mexican, Indigenous, and American influences has been problematically served by labels such as Chicano Art, Mexican–American Art, or Latino Art. Having been born and raised in El Paso, and later moving to San Antonio, my own artistic choices result from the mix of direct and subconscious influence of all three cultures. Recombination is a survival tool—and creative force—for those living in border towns and regions rich with multiple cultural influences. Regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, the artists in Sana Sana Colita de Rana: Artists Influenced by La Cultura are profoundly affected by cultural exchange. Each artist produces work with hybrid influences—the aesthetics and themes of recombination and renegotiation. I borrowed the title for this exhibition from the opening lines of a common saying used to comfort children upset with the pain of a banged elbow, bruised knee, or cut finger. This saying is a life lesson used to express love and caring to a child. These words are evidence of care and healing beyond physical concerns. Passing on knowledge of simple healing rituals and spirituality to the very young insures that cultural values are passed on through generations. Relative to the complex histories that produce American society and today’s global relations, Sana Sana Colita de Rana shows the vibrant character of artistic innovation responding to our histories and nurturing our future.
Born in Ciudad Juárez and now living in El Paso, Francisco Delgado uses satire to address political, social, and economic issues facing Latino communities on both sides of the border. The autobiographical *Los Dos Panchos* delves into the duality of Delgado’s blended Mexican and American background with iconic imagery highlighting cultural references. While his “American side” identifies with technological advancements and pop cultural influences, the “Mexican side” preserves an ancestral link to the Mexican Revolution and the grassroots challenge of “Resiste.” *El Plan* responds to an El Paso city revitalization plan that would threaten the existence of many historical sites with a Quetzalcoatl-inspired/monster movie creature representing this destructive power. In one hand, the beast holds the Pablo Varay Apartment building, where Mariano Azuela began printing his novel about the Mexican Revolution in newspaper format; in the other, he grips a building that was once the home of Henry Flipper, the first African-American to graduate from West Point, as well as that of Teresita Urrea, a well-known healer who drew crowds on a national level. *El Plan* registers protest against destruction of local heritage.

*El Plan* ([The Plan]), acrylic on canvas, 60” x 80”, 2007, collection of Museo Urbano Paso del Sur

*Los Dos Panchos*, Forgive Richard Florida for I know not what I do, acrylic on canvas, 71” x 105”, 2008
Donna Huanca honors her Bolivian–American heritage with references to family and culture. She remains fascinated by the stories her father told of serving in the Bolivian military, the indigenous fabrics used by her mother to drape the family furniture, and the music, always heard in her family’s home. Her imagery projects a statement of cultural legacy in modern times, and everyday materials, including used clothes, old fabrics, and other textiles draw attention to the social conditions and plight of indigenous peoples.

Pachamama refers to the Mother Earth Goddess of the indigenous people, and Huanca’s use of a bright patchwork of fabrics transforms this living tradition into a contemporary object of devotion. In Evo, Huanca depicts Evo Morales, the first Indigenous president of Bolivia, as a saint with the Bolivian flag used as the background with coca leaves, the main crop of the indigenous people, surrounding his head. As in her reference to the turmoil in Ciudad Juárez, Huanca remains committed to the geo-political struggle of the oppressed.
Consciously exploring a direct, anti-formalist style, Ibarra’s videos give a glimpse into the world of the “common man.” With pride in the Southside of San Antonio, Ibarra celebrates the beauty of everyday scenes from his local environment and delights in representations of personal and shared cultural criticism and fantasy. *Tripa Love* considers stereotypes of Mexican culture and comically mocks the threat to Mexican-American taste buds when tripas (intestines) are banned from sale in the United States. This “mockumentary” explores how far a man would go for a taste of his beloved tripas, following him through San Antonio’s world famous Fiesta, as he would risk his life eating them...ordie looking for a source. Locating universal themes in local contexts, *I Luv U Mamas* relates a “love story” but plays with the discourse of conventional narrative form and warns that “love can so good but so dangerous.” The self-deprecating overtones in Ibarra’s work ask the viewer to consider her or his own place in creating cultural definitions.
The work of Los Supersonicos is the result of the collaboration between Carlos Fresquez in the US and Francisco Zamora in Mexico. Their method is unique as each artist makes original contributions to a joint project, sending it back and forth across the border until the work is complete. Doble Jesus is organized through multiple dualities, from the artists’ working method to its religious theme, with Jesus represented in a double vision, making him twice as powerful.

Raza Powered respects Fresquez’s involvement in the Chicano Movement. In his teenage years, Fresquez became politically and culturally active. After listening to “Corky” Gonzales or protesting, Fresquez would go home and watch cartoons on TV, hence becoming empowered and finding his voice in “El Movimiento” and through his interest in learning to draw cartoons. He thus fused together his interests in politics and culture. Fear Ratfink, “Goodbye Big Daddy” pays homage to the popular cartoon creator, Big Daddy Roth and his famous character Ratfink. As tribute and intimate connection, Ratfink and the skull symbolize the death of Big Daddy Roth, and on a more personal note, the rat’s fear of the skull (death) mirrors the artist’s fear of rats. Lucha Libre wrestlers are immortalized in Fresquez’s work Lucharific. Though the wrestling masks reflect a distinctly Mexican iconography, in both countries scantily clad women walk around the ring, holding placards announcing the number of the round.
Since her childhood in Panama, Haydée Victoria Suescum has recognized the profound role that discourses of beauty have on the development of individual subjectivity and the construction of popular norms. Challenging the production of stereotypes that are mass-consumed, Suescum transforms vernacular imagery of hand-painted advertisements with subtle criticism and playful wit. In her installations, Suescum references and alters traditional academic style of art salon display by allowing the works to hang off-center and askew in order to inspire a redefinition of the frameworks of beauty. In Pablo, a young man is neatly presented, with a perfectly trimmed mustache and in the formal style of a Roman bust, to represent the idealism that is fed to children through advertisements and mass media. Concentration on an electric steam iron is commentary on gender and class where women are assigned domestic roles and are taught to desire commodity goods in pursuit of “La Ilusión” of beauty, and she reminds us of the problematic values in “ugly ducklings” becoming beautiful not just through respect for the beauty within but through unbalanced emphasis on surface change.
Trenchard employs the traditional Mexican folk art of papel picado to depict contemporary themes. Her method reinforces her careful observation, and her concentrated efforts respect the values of hard work and community service. Drawn from life, The Bootmaker depicts the enduring roles of craftsmen in the vitality of local communities. The pleasure found in the intimacy and routine of our daily work environments animates Profiles in Beauty, a view of Martin and Liz, owners of a beauty parlor in Blanco. Trenchard’s portrait of Lajos, a Hungarian truck driver now living in San Diego, California, presents him in his daily routine, in the cab of his 18-wheeler. By bracketing lived experience through her art, Trenchard invites her viewers to consider our identifications with others. Grounded with the values of traditional craft, Trenchard’s work encourages consideration of the paradox of the speed with which we live our daily lives relative to the enduring character of memory and artistic representation.