Rupert Garcia MATRIX/BERKELEY 79 University Art Museum late November - mid-January 1985

Une Enigme/A Riddle, 1984



Since 1975 Bay Area artist Rupert Garcia has created vibrantly colored and boldly designed pastel paintings. His subject matter, drawn from documentary photographs and paintings, includes radically cropped, close-up portraits of artistic mentors (Francisco Goya, Rufino Tamayo); political revolutionaries (Ethel and Julius Rosenberg; Mao Tsetung); and unnamed victims of political oppression, such as the murdered protestor in The Assassination of a Striking Mexican Worker.

Recent multi-panel works like

<u>Une Enigme/A Riddle combine</u>

Garcia's art historical and

political concerns.

Portraits of Fernand Leger

(admired by Garcia for his

artistic contributions and

leftist politics) and Eugene

Delacroix flank a detail from

Delacroix's Liberty Leading

the People portraying the

triumphant "Liberty,"

symbolic leader of the

French Revolution.

Like the Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Siqueiros, with whom Garcia feels an affinity, Garcia's political concerns are central to his art. Radicalized by the Third World student protests and peace movements that were taking place in the late sixties when he was an art student at San Francisco State College, Garcia abandoned easel painting. He devoted himself to the silkscreening of political posters that were later inspired by the abstract, two-dimensional style of Cuban revolutionary posters he saw in 1970 in an exhibition at San Francisco's Galeria de la Raza. Garcia became one of the best known and respected poster makers

in the Bay Area, a major center for Chicano poster production. He developed a style characterized by interlocking large, flat and brightly colored shapes that operated on both an abstract and descriptive level, with written words kept to a minimum.

Garcia eventually found the silkscreen process too mechanical and indirect. The transition to the use of pastel as his primary medium occurred in 1975 when Garcia superimposed pastel drawings over his prints. Pastel is a delicate medium, usually associated with subtle color and modest scale (one thinks of Edgar Degas's sketches, for example). Garcia, however, exploits the medium's capacity for producing brilliant hues and sensuous texture in large works on paper.

Although Garcia's identification with his ethnic heritage and with the oppressed peoples of the Third World form the content of his work, "his engagement" as Peter Selz observed, "is definitely with the creation of art." The power of his work derives from Garcia's ability to communicate his message through a strong, decorative style. Though Garcia's use of simplified and abstracted planes of color associates him stylistically with such artists as Henri Matisse and Milton Avery (MATRIX 34), his commitment to an art of social protest places him in the tradition of artists from Goya to Leon Golub (MATRIX 59). Once unfashionable, politically radical art is finding a wider audience in the U.S. just as the country moves toward political conservatism. The recent

international resurgence of expressionist and figurative art, with its emphasis on content, has opened the door to art of social protest.

Not Again is Garcia's newest work. It depicts a man's face, partially obscured by his open hand, placed against a painterly background of soft green, ochre and orange streaks. Along with the use of less aggressive color, Garcia has replaced the sharp edges typical of earlier works with softer transitions. The increased stylistic subtlety in Not Again corresponds to the decreased specificity of the subject matter. Not Again is a universal protest.

Garcia was born in French Camp, California, in 1941 to a Mexican-American family. His earliest introduction to art came through relatives -one grandmother made tissue paper dolls and another designed costumes for a local Mexican dance troupe. Garcia served in the Security Service of the U.S. Air Force from 1962 to 1966. The diptych Prometheus Under Fire, juxtaposing a bomber and a severely foreshortened supine figure of a victim, is based on his experiences in Southeast Asia. After his military release, Garcia enrolled in San Francisco State College, where he received a B.A. in Painting and Drawing (1968) and an M.A. in Printmaking (1970). In 1981 he was awarded an M.A. in the History of art at UC Berkeley. Garcia has taught at UC Berkeley in the Chicano Studies Program since 1979 and in the School of Environmental Design since 1982.

Constance Lewallen

Works in MATRIX:

- 1. Assassination of a Striking Mexican Worker, 1979, pastel on illustration board, 40" x 60".
- 2. Abanderado, 1982, pastel on paper, 40" x 29-3/4". Lent by David and Janet Peoples, Berkeley.
- 3. Olga Tamayo, 1983, pastel on paper, 43" x 33-1/2".
- 4. Rufino Tamayo, 1983, pastel on paper, 43" x 33-1/2".
- 5. Une Enigme/A Riddle, 1984, pastel on three sheets of paper, 42" x 89-1/2" (overall dimensions).
- 6. Not Again, 1984, pastel on two sheets of paper, 40" x 52" (overall dimensions).
- 7. Prometheus Under Fire,
  1984, pastel on two sheets of
  paper, 29-3/4" x 84" (overall
  dimensions).

All works are lent by the artist unless otherwise noted.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

The Oakland Museum, CA, '70;
Artes 6, S.F., '70; Galeria
de la Raza, S.F., '72, '75;
San Francisco Museum of
Modern Art, '78 (catalogue);
University Art Museum, State
University of New York,
Binghamton, '81; UPB Gallery,
Berkeley, '83.

Selected group exhibitions:

Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery, UC Santa Cruz, Califas: An Exhibition of Chicano Artists in California, '81; Sala de Eposiciones del Centro de Estudios Economicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo, Mexico, D.F., A Traves de la Frontera, '83 (traveled, catalogue); Staatliche Kunsthalle, Berlin, W. Germany, Das Andere Amerika, '83 (traveled, catalogue); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Human Condition: SFMOMA Biennial III, '84 (catalogue); Triton Museum, Santa Clara, CA, Crime and Punishment: Reflections of Violence In Contemporary Art, '84 (catalogue).

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Frankenstein, Alfred.
"When Politics and Art Do
Mix," S.F. Chronicle, March
15, '78.

Selz, Peter. "Rupert

Garcia," unpublished manuscript, '80.

Atkins, Robert.

"Mexican Geometrics and Political Portraits," Bay Guardian (S.F.), Feb. 4-11,
'81.

Albright, Thomas.

"Rupert Garcia: Radical
Political Portraits," S.F.
Chronicle, April 28, '83.

Goldman, Shifra M. "A Public Voice: Fifteen Years of Chicano Posters," Art Journal, Spring '84.

Selected bibliography by the artist:

"Recent Raza Murals in the U.S." (co-authored with Tim Drescher), Radical America, April/May, North Cambridge, Mass., 1978.

Frida Kahlo: A

Bibliography and Biographical

Introduction (Chicano

Studies Library Publications

Unit, UC Berkeley, 1983).

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