JEFFREY HUGHES

Situating the macabre alongside a sickeningly sweet popular cartoon image is a typical procedure for Enrique Chagoya, whose exhibition *Utopian Cannibal: Adventures in Reverse Anthropology* critiqued the dominant culture and trans-cultural hybridity. Chagoya appropriates or 'cannibalises' imagery from European art history and Aztec iconography – understanding history as a postmodern, slippery and non-linear construct. The exhibition, organised by FCA curator Mel Watkin, comprised over thirty paintings and artist's books.

Born in the predominantly Hispanic and Native-American Mexico City and now teaching at the multicultural Stanford University in California, Chagoya has experienced many contemporary cultures that are rooted in a European colonial past. 'Reverse anthropology' was coined by the artist to invoke the phrase 'reverse racism', and to examine critically the Western anthropological method of analysing, and typically misinterpreting, non-Western people through their artifacts. If Manet, Picasso and Nolde can 'borrow' from an indigenous visual source, then why not reverse the process? Unlike the appropriation art of the eighties, Chagoya's works are only tangentially about the instability of meaning. He works from an avowedly personal and political stance, proposing visual cannibalism of the powerful forces of European modernism as a surrogate for cultural cannibalism.

In Le Canibal Moderniste (1999), a painting on amate and mounted on linen, these elements grossly yet humorously converge. Even the media are symbolic for Chagoya: amate is the handmade bark paper used in pre-Columbian codices. The Spanish conquistadors destroyed virtually all Aztec books – only sixteen exist in European libraries. The pond and bridge at Giverny

provide the backdrop for the scene, with the title, in elegant cursive script, heralding the burlesque. Monet's severed head – replete with sunglasses and dripping blood – emits an 'idea bubble' of a Mondrian painting, and looks out to Picasso's 1906 self-portrait. But it's Picasso as Popeye, pierced by a spear and with his right arm missing. A central nude female figure, an echo of Gauguin's vision of a Tahitian madonna and child, raises a machete and chews on Picasso/Popeye's amputated arm. A menacing Aztec deity inhabits Monet's floating barge. The lower register suggests the form of an Aztec codex, or equally a Renaissance predella, complete with images of Aztec warriors shooting arrows at the target of a Josef Albers square.

El Canibal Minimalist (1999) and After Homage to the Square (1998) position formalism and the cartoon as opposing forces. In the latter, the inscription 'it was just a dream in english only' appears in cartoon bubbles, with an unknown little girl, evoking the constraints of socialist realism, peering out from the 'Albers' square. A small image of that paragon of popular simple-mindedness, Bart Simpson, oversees from above. Chagoya's contradictions can work in several directions. Pocahontas Gets a New Passport (2000) delicately depicts the princess as the courtly attraction of her day, contrasting her with an expressionistically sketched Aztec woman wearing a headdress and holding a briefcase and feathered sceptre. A cartoon bubble, 'more art faster', appears beside a sketch of an obsidian war mace. The statement is painted over a larger inscription, which simply states: 'more art'. To say that these works are filled with visual code is an understatement. Chagoya's paintings suggest multiple readings that are occasionally glaringly apparent, yet more often intensely cryptic.

Enrique Chagoya – Utopian Cannibal: Adventures in Reverse Anthropology was at the Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, Missouri, 19 January – 10 March 2001. Weblink: www.forumart.org



ENRIQUE CHACOYA, Le Canibal Moderniste, 1999, mixed media on amate on linen. 123 x 244 cm. Courtesy: forum for Contemporary Art. 5t. Louis

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# Reviews

## Gallery Paule Anglim

## Northern California

## Enrique Chagoya at the Berkeley Art Museum



he first major retrospective of Enrique Chagoya's work, recently exhibited at the Berkeley Art Museum, pro-

vided a splendid opportunity to take in the full range of his diverse and penetrating practice. From painting to drawings, printmaking to bookmaking, Chagoya has used a number of methodologies to address complex political and cultural issues, without ever allowing the clashes of traditions and cultures that make up his subject matter to resolve into some smooth aesthetic compromise.

The earliest works in the exhibition were Chagoya's Editorials, oversized canvases of red, black and white, addressing the politics of Reagan-era cultural imperialism. When Paradise Arrived (1988), for instance, features an enormous black Mickey Mouse hand with the words "English only" written on the middle finger, preparing to flick a much smaller immigrant girl. The bold and simple strokes of black and red paint cut across the canvases with a kind of violent brio, as cultural signifiers clash in what Chagoya calls "Aztec dialectics," a kind of hybridity that is decidedly not a peacefully integrated multicultural pluralism subsumed under the melting-pot mythos of "America." Instead, the contestatory relations between mainstream American society and Amerindian and Latino culture remain in ongoing struggle, waged at the symbolic "borderlandia" of the imagination.

Chagoya may be best known locally for his imaginative codices, which investigate early bookmaking as well as providing a kind of nuevo-comix for his particular brand of postcolonial wit. Each codex uses traditional papermaking, with overlaid prints, text and drawings providing a kind of counter-narrative to the "written by the winners" school of historiography. These also function as an innovative combination of narrative painting and sculptural book art, wherein no one genre can contain such fugitive histories. Return of the Macrobiotic Cannibal, for example is a hilarious farce that incorporates what appear to be purloined texts on the stereotypical Mexican immigrant, within a palimpsest of pop and multicultural imagery layered over historical maps, drawings and the like. Related prints use a similar technique, "over writing" on early colonial texts and prints, as if to burden early colonial print culture with its historical legacies.



Enrique Chagoya, Those Specks of Dust, 2006, monotype, 47-3/4" x 34-1/2", at the Berkeley Art Museum.

Perhaps the most ambitious paintings in the exhibit were a number of large canvases that address the clashes-cultural, political and aesthetic-between the West and indigenous and Latino cultures. In these works, Chagoya charts what he terms a "reverse anthropology," putting Western culture—both high and low-on display, in all its own exotic plumages and practices. American comic-book superheroes clash with Aztec deities, and cannibals prepare to fight UN battleships, as the once and future Amerindian landscape becomes a theater for warring aesthetics and cultural icons. Shifting the anthropological gaze from the colonizer to the colonized, Chagoya's pre-Colombians and futuronatives (occasionally seen flying around in spaceships) encounter Euro-American modernity and its iconographies as material for harvesting and ingestion. In The Governor's Nightmare (1994), for instance, Mickey Mouse is served up on a plate for the "restless natives," while Mondrian, Monet and Picasso get recannibalized by Mesoamerican culture in the epic Modernist Cannibal (1999).

Indeed, Chagoya's works in this vein go further than merely shifting the terms of some binary (colonizer-colonized), suggesting a kind of violent reappropriation of culture at the level of the body, the tribe, the species. Oswald de Andrade, the great Brazilian modernist poet and critic, called for anthropophagy, or cannibalism, as the method by which the Latin world might ingest the West and its influences, absorbing yet transforming into one's own. In Chagoya's works, the cannibal represents not only the return of the repressed for American imperialism, but also this more intimate-and violent, and embodied-relationship with the pure products of America. From Superman to the Western art canon, Chagoya's cannibals digest and regurgitate (neo)colonial culture, from high to low, and spit back new forms, harkening back to pre-Columbian iconography as well as for-

ward to hybrid visions of the future. Ángel Rama's theory of transulturación is helpful here, as Chagoya's work argues vigorously for a dialectical transcendence of such cultural clashes, though without ever resorting to an easy rapprochement.

Also featured were three series of satirical drawings; two of them homages to Goya's Disasters of War, in which Reagan-era political concerns meld into deft re-castings of Goya's originals. More recently, Poor George takes Philip Guston's Nixon-era Poor Richard drawings and brings them into the present-day political landscape, while also palimpsesting the era of Bush II over the secretive shenanigans of Nixon's reign of error.

These satirical works were less exciting than Chagoya's larger projects, if only in that they were less ambitious, and their politics less ambiguous, though the Gova series were exquisitely crafted. The most recent works on display show Chagoya returning to his large-scale "editorials," as with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Road Map (both 2004), wherein the machinations of the Bush war machine come under the scrutiny of Chagoya's unwaveringly critical eye. As with the full range of his practice on display here, it remains clear that no form of cultural or political tyranny is safe from Chagoya's reimaginings of our hybrid pasts, presents and futures.

-David Buuck

Enrique Chagoya:

Borderlandia closed May

18 at the Berkelef Art Museum.

David Buuck is a contributing editor to Artweek

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## Enrique Chagoya: Borderlandia at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive



Enrique Chagoya: When Paradise Amved, 1988; Charcoal and pastel on paper, 80 x 80 inches (203.2 x 203.2 cm); di Rosa Preserve, Napa, California, Photo. Wolfgang Dietze, courtesy of Gallery Paulo Anglim © Enrique Chagoya.

BERKELEY, CA.- The University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) is pleased to announce a major, twenty-five-year survey of work by Enrique Chagoya. The exhibition features more than seventy works—paintings, charcoal and pastel drawings, prints, and mixed-media codices (accordion-folded books)—that intermingle icons and cultural references spanning hundreds of years and thousands of mites. Enrique Chagoya: Borderlandia is on view at BAM/PFA through May 18, 2008.

Chagoya's subject matter reflects his own personal history and interests: Mexico's complex past, international politics, various religions, art history, and popular culture. He draws on all of these sources, combining cultural symbols to create scenes of hybrid worlds and scathing—and often humorous—

political and social satire. According to the artist, "Humankind is in constant war with itself, perfectly capable of total destruction. This is the raw material for my art.

A consistent focus of Chagoya's work is the manner in which more powerful nations have dominated others and availed themselves of resources, both natural and cultural. For centuries, Western artists have used Indigenous and folk art as a source for their work: for example, Pablo Picasso's use of African tribal masks in his Cubist paintings, or Frank Lloyd Wright's incorporation of Mayan architectural forms and motifs in his designs. Chaqova inverts this practice in a process he calls "reverse anthropology," placing icons from the dominant American culture within Indigenous or colonial settings, so that Superman faces off with an Aztec god, or cannibals run amok in Monet's gardens at Giverny. Chagoya has described this world of intermingled influences as a place where 'all cultures meet and mix in the richest ways, creating the most fertile ground for the arts ever imagined.

Chagoya also borrows from the canon of Western art, adapting works by Francisco Goya and Philip Guston (satirizing, respectively, Napoleon's invasion of Spain and the Nixon administration) to contemporary political contexts (the Reagan and current administrations). He also often utilizes traditional Mexican approaches to art making; his paintings on aluminum directly refer to the folk art tradition of the ex-voto or retablo, while his paintings on amate—fig bark—allude to the ancient Aztec and Mayan codex books. Drawing on the rich tradition of Mexican political prints, particularly José Guadalupe Posada. Chagoya's intelligent and witty narratives send up and, at times, celebrate the complicated cultural and psychological consequences of more than 500 years of contact and influence between worlds.

Born in Mexico City in 1953, Chagoya regularly visited the museums of the capital city and Teotihuacán as a child. These cultural institutions provided him with his first exposure to pre-Columbian culture. He moved to the United States in 1979 and in 1984 he enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute, where he created the powerful work that begins this mid-career survey exhibition. In 1986 he completed an MA, and in 1987 an MFA, at the University of California, Berkeley, Chagoya has taught printmaking at Stanford University since 1995. His work is included in the collections of many major museums, including the Library of Congress Print Collection and the National Museum of American Art, Washington DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Centro Cultural de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico; Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; The Art Institute of Chicago; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Enrique Chagova: Borderlandia is organized by Patricia Hickson, Des Moines Art Center curator and manager of its satellite gallery, the Des Moines Art Center Downtown. After its presentation at BAM/PFA, the exhibition will travel to the Palm Springs Art Museum (September 27 - December 28, 2008).

### Today's News

March 26, 2008

Christie's Rediscover Watteau's La Surprise - Lost and Unseen By The Public For 200 Years

The Mystery of Alchemy and its Influence on Baroque Glass Explored at The Corning Museum of Glass

French Institute Alliance Française (FIAF) Presents Peter Knapp: La passion des images

Hood Explores Views of Black Womanhood Through Time and Across Continents

Enrique Chagoya: Borderlandia at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

Hammer Projects: Aaron Morse at The Hammer Museum

"Past Time: Photographic Exchange" on View at the Demuth Museum

Museum of Modern Art Presents Geometry of Motion 1920s/1970s

Flooring Installation Underway for New Art Museum

2008 West Michigan Area Show Seeks Entries from Regional Artists

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# Enrique Chagoya

Written by Julio Céaser Morals





Enrique Chagoya, Untitled (Shoes), 2004, Charcoal, pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 60" x 60"

First feature in a series of interviews with Bay Area Latino artists and curators.

## Not many people are aware that you where the director of Galeria de La Raza in the 90's. Can you talk about your experience and what the San Francisco art scene was like at that moment in time?

I was the Artistic Director there from 1987 to 1990. It was during the time of the so-called "multiculturalism", which I think was mostly a fad in terminology that did not bring any significant changes to artists of color or women in terms of their access to the main stream art world. Even prior to its creation in 1970, the Galeria has been short on presenting solo exhibitions to women artists. Although, to be fair, the Galeria they did have a couple [women artists] and most of the shows were thematic and inclusive not only of women, but of non-Latino artists.

When I was invited to take care of the exhibitions program I decided to have the solo shows dedicated to women artists like Cristina Emanuel, Ester Hernandez, Yolanda Lopez, Graciela Iturbide, Barbara Carrasco and Juana Alicia (that last two exhibited together in a two person exhibition). We also continued thematic exhibitions implemented by the previous directors, Rene Yañez and Ralph Maradiaga, such as Day of the Dead and politically focused exhibitions like Beyond Prison Walls/Art by Puerto Rican Political Prisioners. In my three years at Galeria de la Raza, Day of the Dead exploded. We coordinated the exhibition with two other organizations, the Mission Cultural Center, and La Raza Graphics (long time gone). The Day of the Dead procession on 24th Street went from about eight hundred people in 1987 to about five thousand people in 1990 (that was more like a demonstration). I invited artisans from Mexico, like the papier-mâché artists Miguel and Ricardo Linares and the sugar skull maker whose name I can't recall right now. We exported Day of the Dead to other places like New York City at the New Alternative Museum where I was co-curator with Sal Garcia and the exhibition marked the first Day of the Dead in that city. In 1990 the Smithsonian invited us to exhibit Day of the Dead, but that was the year I renounced my job to start teaching at Berkeley and subsequently, the exhibition never happened.

Also, I was interested in bringing young artists from Mexico and in 1990, with the support of the Festival 2000 promoted by Rene Yañez, I was able to invite artists Gabriel Orozco (before he was so famous), Silvia Gruner, and Eugenia Vargas (a Chilean living in Mexico City at the time). We also exchanged exhibitions with Germany, Russia, and Puerto Rico. I was also co-curator of a drawing show with Larry Rinder for the Drawing Center in New York. It was an amazing experience for me. I was getting more and more involved in curatorial projects. Unfortunately, it was all taking a lot of my time making it difficult to make my own work for which I was receiving more and more calls to exhibit. So, when I got an invitation to teach for a year at the UC Berkeley Art Department I decided to take a chance. I quit my job at the Galeria, which was pretty stable, and went to teach at the risk of being out of work within a year. I guess I just gave priority to making my artwork and teaching gave me more time to make more of it. I still have great memories of the Galeria. I believe the current director, Carolina Ponce de Leon, has done a terrific job keeping it updated with new artists, and exciting shows.

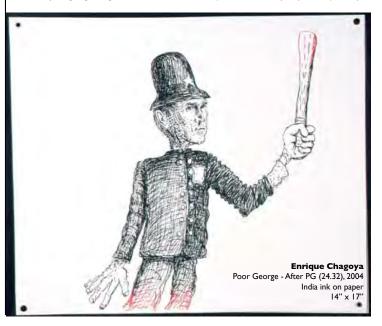
"For me the first 'illegal aliens' were the Conquistadores and the Pilgrims because they arrived without passports and broke the law of many Indigenous nations across the Americas. Most of them were economic refugees, or were escaping the oppression in Europe. Some were also criminals. Therefore, they were very similar to contemporary "illegal aliens." This country owes its creation to illegal immigration."

Artists that are first generation Latin-American immigrants to this country do not want to be identified as Latino. Do you think there is a shift in how artists of Latin decent in the U.S. are actively avoiding being Latino or Chicano and if so, why?

The "multikultis" were gone a long time ago and now everybody seems to be "global." Identity issues are more off the front page for many Latino artists. However, there is a very strong xenophobic wave in this country, which started after 9-11 where suddenly the Southern border is a threat (even though all the terrorists responsible of the tragedy of September II came from the Middle East through Europe, or Canada, via legal immigration) and this is creating a Latino grass roots movement. I hope this will bring a fresh wave of emerging Latino artists addressing such discrimination. Most of the time we hear the term "illegal aliens" used to refer to dark skin undocumented immigrants, mostly Latin Americans and Mexicans. For me the first "illegal aliens" were the Conquistadores and the Pilgrims because they arrived without passports and broke the law of many Indigenous Nations across the Americas. Most of them were economic refugees, or were escaping the oppression in Europe. Some were criminals too. Therefore, they were very similar to contemporary "illegal aliens." This country owes its creation to illegal immigration. We are all a part of it, and sometimes my art reflects my experience of that view. I became an American citizen more than a decade ago and I am proud of it, but inside I often feel like a citizen of a borderless country. Where humanity is all from the same country, and borders (geographical and social) are an ideological construct, a line in our minds. Unfortunately, some borders with invisible lines are very real and it takes a long time before people cross them to realize that in spite of our many differences we are the same species.

You mention that your work is based on the idea that History is told by those who win wars. Has your conceptual practice been affected by our current government now that Obama is president, we've ended the eight years of George Bush in the White House, and have apparently killed Bin-Laden? If so, how?

The current political reality is just as complex and unresolved as ever. President Obama promised more than what he has been able or willing to deliver, and the ruling financial oligarchy (the marriage of financial/industrial capital with government) has been getting away with everything regarding its role on the recession (or should we say depression) it helped



to create during the kingdom of the "free" market economy. Everybody is amazed to see that some of the same people that participated in such a mess are still in positions of power in financial institutions (public and private). It is scary to see, since the 1970's, how every time a bubble bursts it gets bigger, while each time Wall Street is responsible and each time there is a bail out by the government followed by attacks on government intervention in the economy by the same private sector that benefits from it. Just read the theories of Economists like Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman, and you'll see a pretty hopeless situation. Politicians, right and left, become willing participants in a puppet theatre. All this is raw material for my work. Nevertheless, sometimes I feel like becoming an abstract artist and to forget about any conceptual satirical work. But so much raw material would be a waste to let go without dealing with it. I already did few pieces on the current economy that I showed at Gallery Paule Anglim and at the Di Rosa Preserve in January and February of this year.

## Your work was attacked and destroyed at the Loveland Museum Gallery in Loveland, Colorado. Can you tell us about that?

That was a very surprising event for me. Artists in general have no control over how people will react to their work. The book attacked and destroyed was The Misadventures of the Romantic Cannibals from 2002, and I have been showing it in many places on the West Coast and on the East Coast, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, Colorado, without any negative reaction (the protests started when the same show traveled to the Loveland Museum in Loveland, Colorado a few months later). The book, which has a multilinear narrative, includes my reaction to the hypocrisy of religious institutions that attack same sex marriage while hiding the pedophilia within its priests. It also includes my reaction to the role of the church in the indigenous cultural destruction, and the use of religion for war (like politicians calling for a "Crusade" before the invasion of Iraq). So the book is pretty rich in non-verbal narratives. It is not illustrational, but rather an expressive work that uses collage as pictorial language. However, 2010 was an election year and a local city councilman in Loveland, who holds ultra conservative views, saw an opportunity to promote his views by inciting a religious protest outside the Museum. In no time Fox News invited him to trash my work on Fox News and Friends. Fox News only gave me a chance to respond online after the broadcast. For the most part the issues of pedophilia, homophobia, and other topics in the book were ignored. All you heard was that the book was pornographic and portrayed offensive pictures of Jesus. I explained that there was no Jesus in the work but rather collaged images of Mexican comic books, religious icons, and pre-Columbian art among other styles. There was no nudity or sexual acts going on. The work is provocative, but it is not pornographic and it isn't an attack on faith. Also, at the City Council meeting in Loveland, it did not meet the legal definition of obscene which is required in order to remove it from a public space like the Museum. It was my way of expressing the spiritual corruption of religious institutions that need to accept responsibility [for this corruption]. Fortunately, a Pastor from Loveland accepted my explanation, and defended my work even against some members of his congregation who wanted to join the protesters. The name of the Pastor is |onathan Wiggins from the Resurrection Fellowship in Loveland. We became friends, and in few days he invited me to make a "non-corrupted" portrait of Jesus for his church. I told him that even though I am not religious I would be glad to do it if his congregation accepted it from me. The next day, a woman truck driver from Montana drove all the way to Loveland and destroyed my printed book with a crowbar. She was wearing a t-shirt with the words "Jesus is tougher than nails." Pastor Wiggins later said to his congregation that if Jesus is tougher than nails nobody needs to defend him. A few days later he sent me a link to a video of a sermon where he read our correspondence to his congregation regarding the painting, and they accepted with a standing ovation. I was very moved. I just finished the painting and sent it to the Resurrection Fellowship in Loveland and I spoke by phone to Pastor Wiggins and his congregation right after the unveiling. It was an explosion of joy. They were very happy with the painting and I am very happy too. There was a whole article about this featured in Art in America online titled, "The Print and the Pastor", written by Faye Hirsch while I was working on it a few months ago. In the Fall, Art in America will include the incident in a larger article regarding the various attacks on art in recent months, written by Eleanor Heartney. In the end, I made more friends than enemies. I received great support from everyone at Stanford. The faculty, the students, the Chair of my department, and the Dean (who advised me on how to deal with hate mail), the school police (that analyzed such hate mail and contacted police in San Francisco and Loveland among other places to collect information and support) and finally from the President of the University who sent me a very nice letter regarding the painting I did for the Resurrection Fellowship.

### Has that incident influenced your approach to art making?

It has influenced my awareness of the context since I may, or may not, be able to show everything I make. I showed the controversial piece *The Misadventures of the Romantic Cannibals* at the Sanchez Art Center in Pacifica, and at the Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco during my traveling print retrospective just about two months before the attack in Loveland. Also simultaneously with the show in Loveland I had another copy of the same book in Washington DC at the Davis+Reyes Gallery (right before the incident with David Wojnarowicz video at the Smithsonian just two blocks from that gallery), and nobody protested in any of those places.

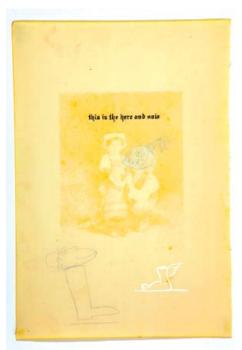
Time and place may affect what any artist can show. Like during Hitler's pre-war years in Germany, when he organized the exhibition, *Degenerate Art*, where German expressionist artists were ridiculed before they were censored and persecuted. Or places like Iran today, where the government not only censors any art in any private gallery, but they also break into collector's homes and confiscate their collections because they are offensive to the theocracy of the country. The recent case of Ai Wei Wei being arrested in China for his views on the misdeeds of the ruling bureaucracy is only the tip of a huge iceberg of censorship on artists and intellectuals in that country. Not all places in the world, or even in this country, are as open minded as the Bay Area. We live in a bubble, but I love my bubble and I am not sure I could live anywhere else.

#### What are you currently working on?

More codices, more drawings (large and small), more paintings, and on this interview. I am thinking about becoming more abstract (figurative and non figurative abstraction) and I may explore that path.

This is the first in a series of interviews with Bay Area Latino artists and curators.

# Enrique Chagoya "Ghostly Meditations" 2010, 11"x 14" India ink and acrylic on vintage paper with ghost prints on facing pages of old etchings from a 19th Century book.









## Enrique Chagoya

Enrique Chagoya is currently a Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Stanford University. His work can be found in many public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco among others. He has been the recipient of numerous awards such as NEA Artists Fellowships, the Tiffany Fellowship and Artadia to mention a few. He is represented by Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco.

### **Julio César Morales**

Julio César Morales is an artist, educator and curator. He teaches at The San Francisco Art Institute and is also the founder of Queens Nails Annex/Projects in San Francisco and is currently an adjunct curator at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Julio is also represented by Frey Norris Gallery in San Francisco.

Enrique Chagoya Liberty Club IV, 2007 Charcoal and pastel on paper mounted on carvas