

ALBA CALERO VALDES

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LATINA ARTISTS • ARTISTAS LATINAS

Elia Alba • Rodríguez Calero • Juana Valdes



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INTRODUCTION

This exhibition brings together the work of three Latina artists that live and work in the New Jersey/New York area. By birth or heritage their roots are in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean; Rodríguez Calero was born in Puerto Rico, Juana Valdes in Cuba and Elia Alba was born in New York of Dominican parents. Within its diversity the Spanish-speaking Caribbean shares a similar colonial history, a hybrid spirituality and a multi-racial identity. All of these issues continue to be potent in the lives and culture(s) of Latinos in the United States. Alba, Rodríguez Calero and Valdes explore and confront these in their respective bodies of work.

All three artists stretch the definitions of their mediums, Alba is a sculptor that works in photography, while Valdes integrates ceramics, photography and found objects into installations, and Rodríguez Calero reconstructs the figure with collage and photos in her paintings. Photography, manipulated, altered and even parodied, is a source for these three artists.

For the past 4 years Elia Alba has combined sewing and photography to create her photo-based masks. The models for the initial photos are female friends and family of the artist. The masks are then worn by other individuals that physically do not align with the masks, and these are photographed in various settings. The final digital prints that we see in this exhibition embody notions of identity crisis and forced mutations. In the words of the artist: *"They present us a future inclusive of difference and a collapse of our perceptions."*¹

Rodríguez Calero's artistic production consists of paintings, prints and small collages. Her paintings, which she defines as "acrollages," are constructed through subtle layers of pigment, stencils, found imagery and photos taken by her. Practically all of her paintings represent the figure, and these are charged with the iconographic presence of Catholic saints, whether in a specific portrait (the late Nuyorican poet Pedro Pietri) or a purely imaginative work like Preternatural. Her "saints" are our contemporaries, who live and struggle in an urban world where miracles can happen.

Juana Valdes mixed media installations are profound meditations on colonial and post-colonial histories, from her ceramic paper boats (which narrate the conquering of the non-European world and the slave trade) to her use of maps and found objects, her pieces ask the viewer disturbing questions. And yet these visual confrontations of Valdes are constructed in a language that is in its austerity and elegance, almost neo-classical.

The works of these three Latina artists are formally beautiful, but they are more than that. They challenge and disturb us with visions that both embrace and critique the world we inhabit.

Alejandro Anreus, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Art History and Latin American/Latino Studies

¹ Elia Alba, Artist's statement, summer 2008.

ELIA ALBA



Goldilocks(s), 2008, digital c-print mounted on sintra, 29x29



Into the Woods, 2008, digital c-print mounted on sintra, 29x29

Artist Statement: For the past 4 years, I have been combining sewing with photography to create photo-based masks. The images used for the masks are of female friends and family. They are created through a photo-transfer process from an actual photograph I have taken. Other individuals then wear the masks and are re-photographed with wigs and other props in different environments and settings. Because the facial features of the mask do not align with the features of the wearer, they present to the viewer a new "face" within the photograph, one that folds and indents to create a distorted personality. You can say, that the masks are photographs looking back at the viewer from within another photograph, a double illusion twice removed. These masks function as both substitute heads and portraits and present individuals that are dramatic in their strangeness, displaying a world of contradictions and ambiguity. In the photographs, the "performers" are all women and are presented as fantasy creatures, beautiful, yet somewhat disturbing, where a woman can have dark hands, yet a fair face and body. They embody a notion of identity crisis, a forced mutation yet aspire to a super-race. They present us a future inclusive of difference and a collapse of our perceptions.

RODRÍGUEZ CALERO



Santa de la Inocencia, 2008, acollage on canvas, 54x24



Preternatural, 2008, acrollage on canvas, 52x42

Artist Statement: The imagery is permitted to emerge from the paint. These evoke a range of symbolic themes, and employ a renewed vocabulary of Classical traditions as well as an urban sensibility, representing a new generation.

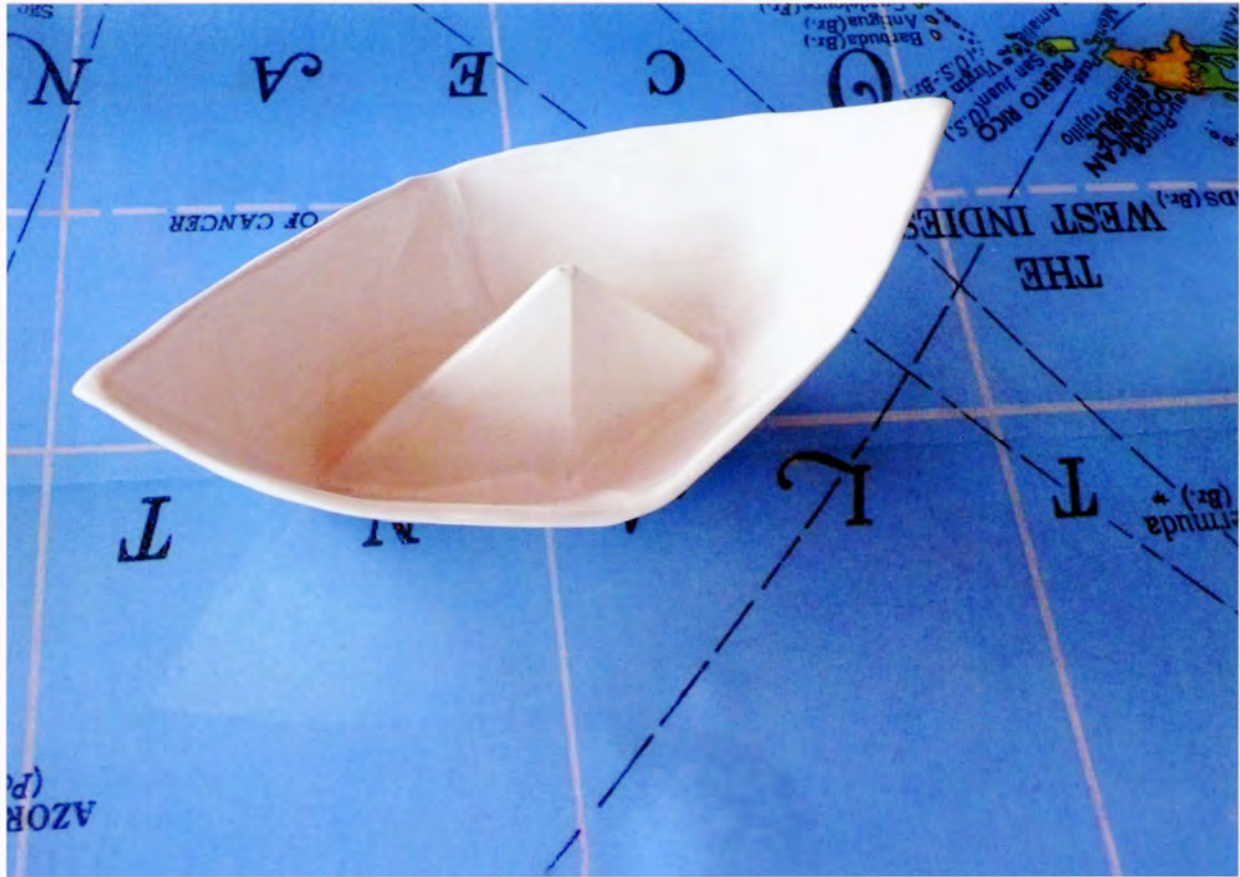
My approach comes through in my work, not only technically, but also in subject matter. The blending of elements offers an open ended means to present ideas and feelings. My visual forms evoke an image of familiarity and sentiment. The composition of the human figure, which in my case is diverse, multicultural, creates a world characterized by complex currents, these are powerful, lyrical, and exhilarating, resulting in a rich interplay of the visual. The iconographic mission is to build bridges between cultures using a spirit of universality.

I create images that gather and dispense energy and transcend the area of imagination, producing pictures that are engaging, and hopefully thought provoking.

JUANA VALDES



The Journey Within, 2003, porcelain, 79-100 pieces, each 5x6x3



West Indies, (detail), 2007, porcelain, acrylic, wood, photo, 20x20x40

Artist Statement: My work ranges from sculptural installations to hand-crafted works of fabric, photography, and video. I was born in Cuba and raised in Miami, my work balances a combination of atmospheric storytelling and insistent feminist inquiry, brought to life through a thread of rural mysticism. A persistent interest in the semiotics of commercial and mass-produced imagery animates and fuses the elements of my art. My work projects the persona of an artist who is apparently part shaman, part urbane anthropologist, engagingly and allusively translating the details of my life history and wide-ranging visual interests. My works in photography and installation explore migration and transculturation directly and poetically, recreating both displacement and recollection. They elicit migration as a complex process, constructing history through a continuum that involves both the original sources of the diasporic community and the new homeland. The work reflects on the migrant's search for utopia, questions Latino or "others" representation in mainstream America—what is ascribed, contested, granted, created—and investigates the connection between the constituent multiple cultures and nations. These serve as the raw material for my aesthetic and formal investigation.

I believe the dynamism of my work is vested in the transition from sculpture to installation to performance, thereby shifting fields, and exchanging modes of visual recognition. Thereby, I balance such questions as "where and what is the art in art?" and "when does it separate from daily life?"

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

ELIA ALBA

Elia Alba was born in New York City of Dominican parents. She received a BA in Philosophy and Literature from Hunter College in 1994. In 2001 she completed the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Since 2000 she has participated in over 50 group exhibitions.

Selected Awards

Aljira Emerge Fellowship, Newark, NJ
Pollock – Krasner Foundation Grant
Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant
Studio Museum in Harlem, Artist-in-Residence Fellowship Program
Bronx Museum of the Arts, Artists in the Marketplace Program

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2005 Hybrid Realities, Atlantica TransArt and Universidad Austral de Chile, Santiago, Chile
2003 indenti-kits, Jersey City Museum, New Jersey
Project Room, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, Florida
2001 Doll Heads, Casa de Teatro, IV Caribbean Biennial, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Public Collections

Jersey City Museum, New Jersey
El Museo del Barrio, New York City
Lowe Art Museum, Miami, Florida
Museo de Arte Moderno, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan, Puerto Rico

RODRÍGUEZ CALERO

Rodríguez Calero was born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York City. She studied printmaking with Lorenzo Homar at the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña School of Fine Arts. In New York she studied painting and collage with Leo Manso at the Art Student's League of New York. Since 1990 she has participated in over 80 group exhibitions. For the past 18 years she has worked and resided in New Jersey.

Selected Awards

New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Individual Artist Grant
Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant
Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Grant
New York Foundation for the Arts, Individual Artist Grant
McDowell Travelling Scholarship

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2008 Jersey City Museum, New Jersey
2001 The Tomasulo Gallery, Union County College, Cranford, New Jersey
2000 Spirituals and Blues, ARS Gallery, Union City, New Jersey

Public Collections

Jersey City Museum, New Jersey
El Museo del Barrio, New York City
Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan, Puerto Rico

JUANA VALDES

Juana Valdes was born in Cuba and raised in Miami, Florida. She received her BFA from Parsons School of Design in 1991, and her MFA from the School of Visual Arts in 1993. In 1995 she attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Since 1994 she has participated in 52 group exhibitions.

Selected Awards

Atlantic Center for the Arts, Individual Artist Grant
Lower East Side Printshop, Individual Artist Grant
Cuban Artist Fund Grant
Pollock – Krasner Foundation Grant

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2006 Juana Valdes, *Looking Back 1994-2004*, Paul Sharpe Contemporary Art, New York City
2002 Juana Valdes/Pedro Velez, Bronx River Art Center, Bronx, New York
2000 Haarlem/Harlem – *Transported Illusions*, Begane Grond Kunstcentrum, Utrecht, Netherlands

Public Collections

Jersey City Museum, New Jersey
The Newark Museum, New Jersey

WORKS INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBIT

Elia Alba

Gantry, 2007, c-print mounted on sintra, diptych, 29x58 (each image 29x29)
Animalia, 2008, digital c-print mounted on sintra, 29x29
Into the Woods, 2008, digital c-print mounted on sintra, 29x29
Water Tree, 2008, digital c-print mounted on sintra, 29x29
Goldilocks(s), 2008, digital c-print mounted on sintra, 29x29

Rodríguez Calero

Amanece, 2006, acrollage on canvas, 52x36
El Reverendo Pedro Pietri, 2006, acrollage on canvas, 42x32
The Blessing of Lazarus, 2007, acrollage on canvas, 48x36
Preternatural, 2008, acrollage on canvas, 52x42
Santa de la Inocencia, 2008, acrollage on canvas, 54x24

(The term acrollage was coined by the artist to define her multi-layered acrylic-based collage/painting technique)

Juana Valdes

Sweet Jewel, Spanish Nut, Devil's Food, Café Noir, War Dance, 2004, silkscreen, five prints, each 22x32
The Journey Within, 2003, porcelain, 79-100 pieces, each 5x6x3
Port au Prince, 2004, porcelain, wood, plexi-glass, clear acrylic inkjet print, 38x4x8
West Indies, 2007, porcelain, acrylic, wood, photo, 20x20x40
Visual Literacy Vol. II, 2008, digital photograph, books, shelves, objects, 30x40x9

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This exhibition was made possible in part by a grant from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Department of State.

