

“WE ARE YOU,” US Latinization’s Next Wave:

ESTABLISHING A “NEW” DIRECTION FOR 21st CENTURY LATINO ART IN THE USA: (The Ground-breaking Emergence of the *We Are You Project’s WAY IT’S* Art Exhibition)

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“Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect. But we have never had to put a wall up”

----- President John F. Kennedy’s Berlin Wall Speech, 1963.

“Finish the border fence now.” ----- US Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina, 2010.

From its inception in 2005, New York City’s *We Are You Project* (WAY) has been a revolutionary Latino socio-artistic phenomenon ripe with both national and global implications, using art to shed light on five pertinent 21st Century Latino themes: 1). Latino immigration, 2). *Latinization*, 3). the current Anti-Latin backlash, 4). The rise of Pan-Latino transculturalism, as well as examining 5). Latino identity in the 21st Century. Also, motivating the *We Are You Project* are recent US Census figures, which indicate that after 2050 CE, the US-Latino population will represent 51% of the total US-population. Wisely,



Frédéric Bartholdi’s “*Statue of Liberty*”

WAY apprehends the inevitability of Latino population growth, realizing that it will occur despite the height-and-length of ridiculous billion-dollar barbed-wire topped fences and walls along the Rio Grande and the Sonoran Desert. The reaching of a 51% majority status after 2050 CE will redefine or reclassify Latino culture and Latino art as America’s dominant “mainstream culture and art.” This glaring US

socio-cultural inevitability is known as **Latinization**, whose greatest manifestation will be felt economically, in terms of Latino buying power; as well as politically, as Latinos assume greater political-awareness and activism. Already, **Latinization** is apparent in the arts (i.e., movies, music, dance, visual art, and other art-forms), fulfilling the enlightened prophecy made in 1987 by art-critic Barbara Rose in *New Criterion* magazine, where she claimed that Latino Art is, “Among the best art being done in America.” Today, as manifested by the **We Are You Project**’s daring artistic initiatives, Rose’s assertion remains a farsighted and accurate observation. Yet, as a “way” (by means of art, culture, and creativity) for Latinos to address immigration, **Latinization**, Anti-Latino ethno-racism, pan-Latin transculturalism and Latino identity, the **We Are You Project** did not arise over-night from thin-air, rather **WAY**’s post-2005 legacy can be traced to America’s socio-political struggles for civil rights, tolerance, and freedom spanning from the late-18th Century until now.

As a “way” to spotlight the contributions of US-Latinos within America’s (1776 until now) history of socio-political struggle for civil rights, tolerance, and freedom, the **We Are You Project** has initiated a landmark artistic initiative; selecting and presenting key Latino artists and art-works for a global-venture known as the **We Are You International Traveling Show (WAY IT’S)**, which has garnered a comprehensive array of art-works done by major contemporary Latino artists, reflecting ancestral heritages from over a dozen Latin American nations. Most importantly, these selected artists examine or exemplify difficult 21st Century Latino concerns, i.e., immigration, **Latinization**, discrimination, pan-Latin transculturalism, cultural identity as well as recent examples of growing US ethno-racism. Behind these problematic Latino concerns, their contextual impetus ensues from eight (8) key Latino socio-political and art historical events, affecting every Latina/o living in the USA. The primary sources of **WAY IT’S** subject matter and iconology are these eight decisive “US-related” socio-political and art historical events, which include: 1). The fact that Frédéric Bartholdi’s “*Statue of Liberty*” was influenced by Edouard de Laboulaye’s symbolic interpretation (or analysis) of the US *The Bill of Rights*. 2). The recent bevy of unconstitutional Latino immigration laws (e.g., Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and other states)

that have unjustly targeted Hispanics. 3). The **14th Amendment's** “untapped” inherent potential to provide civil-rights protection to Latinos, as well as basing current Hispanic needs for civil rights upon the sterling example of Dr. Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s (SCLC’s) struggles for African-American civil rights in the late-1950s and throughout the 1960s. 4). The Pro-Latino implications of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling known as ***Pedro Hernandez v. The State of Texas***. 5). since 1992, the rise of “***Latinization.***” 6). The official 1992 national US celebration of 1492’s Quincentenary. 7). The 1977 rise of Latino Postmodernism and 8). current 21st Century pan-Latino transculturalism. These eight socio-political and artistic “ideas”/“events” comprise the ***We Are You International Traveling Show’s*** prime motivations.

The Impact of Edouard de Laboulaye’s Ideas on Bartholdi’s “Statue of Liberty:”



Frédéric Bartholdi’s “***Statue of Liberty***”

Paradoxically one of the prime influences motivating 21st Century ***WAY IT'S*** art is Frédéric Bartholdi’s “***Statue of Liberty***,” a 19th Century work of art, which “currently” terrifies hardnosed US rightwing extremists, because that ***magnum opus*** symbolizes an open-door policy toward immigration, “welcoming” what right-wingers deem to be highly undesirable: a glut of Latino immigrants and refugees. Sadly, the US political right cannot fathom or comprehend the value of additional Latino immigrants, or worse, they hate the colossal bronze statue because they astutely interpret ***Lady Liberty***’s hidden iconology, correctly --- as it was originally described and intended by 19th Century French historian Edouard de Laboulaye.

In 1865, during a party near Versailles at the home of Edouard de Laboulaye, the conversation turned to Abraham Lincoln's assassination, prompting the host to assert that the USA's victory in the Civil War and Lincoln's martyrdom signified America's striving to achieve the ideals celebrated within three of its founding-documents: *Declaration of Independence* (1776), the *US Constitution* (1788), and *The Bill of Rights* (1791). De Laboulaye insisted that the *The Bill of Rights* was the most inspiring. Among the guests was Frédéric Bartholdi, a young Alsatian *Beaux-Arts* neo-classical sculptor. De Laboulaye suggested to Bartholdi that a sculptural-tribute ought to be erected, honoring the ideal of universal human "Freedom" for which Lincoln died, as well as the 625,000 US Civil War combatants. De Laboulaye insisted that it should be a monument about all humanity's (as well as the USA's) eternal aspiration to attain the ideals engraved in *The Bill of Rights*. Furthermore, he suggested that preferably France should create and provide such an impressive gift for the 1876 centennial celebration commemorating the 1776 American Revolution, ---- to which, Bartholdi proclaimed, "I will do it!"

Curiously, during de Laboulaye's party, the discussion had been about the US Civil War (1861-1865); nevertheless, as the last guests departed, it was clear that this friendly get-together had germinated a trans-Atlantic plan for a colossal French sculpture entitled, *La Liberté éclairant le monde* (*Liberty Enlightening the World*), which would continually celebrate and reaffirm the virtues of America's Revolution (1776- 1783). Even today, this gigantic and thought-provoking memorial continues to rouse great hope among all freedom-loving and just people, who see *Lady Liberty* standing defiantly in New York's harbor. Stealthily, the *Statue of Liberty*'s capacity to inspire hope results from its inherent "*Laboulayean*" iconology, which ingeniously implies that the USA's 19th Century Civil War was merely an extension of America's 18th Century Revolution. Evidence of this is apparent in the broken chains at the feet of the statue, which symbolically references Lincoln's 1863 emancipation of the slaves.

The first artist to fully comprehend these innate "*Laboulayean*" motifs that cloak Bartholdi's *The Statue of Liberty* was the Brazilian Postmodernist Duda Penteadó in his Neo-Neoexpressionist piece

entitled *We Are You* (2005), which presents a colorful hyper-emotive image of a Latina mother protecting her infant child, symbolizing America's emergent 21st Century Latino population. Throughout his *We*



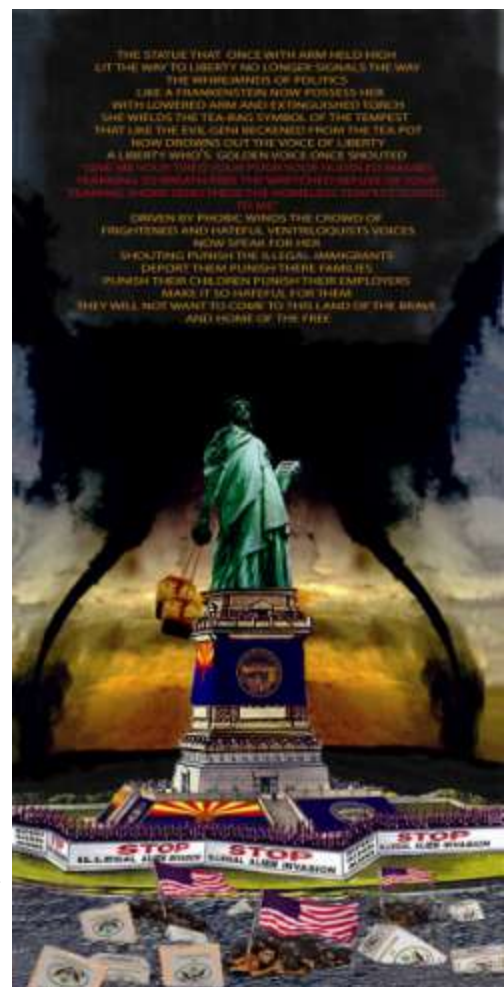
Duda Penteadó "We Are You" 2005, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 24" (Collection of the artist).

Are You piece, Penteadó ingeniously alludes to Bartholdi's *Liberty*, as well as de Laboulaye's insistence that America must continue to cultivate *The Bill of Rights* (with its ideals of *fairness* and *due process*) hopefully praying that in the 21st Century, these *Rights* will protect Latinos from the throng of 21st Century unconstitutional and anti-American laws recently passed in Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and other states, which unfairly target Hispanics.

Similar to

Penteadó's fascination with *Lady Liberty*, the grand master of Latino contemporary art, Raphael Montanez Ortiz, the Founder in 1969 of El Museo del Barrio (East Harlem, NYC) created a large (5' x 9') digital collage masterpiece entitled *Liberty in a Tempest Teapot* (2011), utilizing Bartholdi's *Statue of Liberty*

as an allegorical metaphor. Additionally, Ortiz's daring image provides a thought-provoking satirical re-writing of Emma Lazarus's *New Colossus* poem (1883), which he ironically alters to describe the current



Raphael Montanez Ortiz "Liberty in a Tempest Teapot" 2011, Digital Collage Painting, 5' x 9' (Collection of the Artist).

heartbreaking betrayal of the US **Bill of Rights** by blustering far-right extremists within the new-fangled Tea Party, who avidly advocate repressive discrimination against Latinos. Ortiz's dramatic image bravely solicits, "Who or what will save America from this rising 21st Century anti-Latino neo-fascist storm?"

The Inherent Potential of the **14th Amendment's** to Protect the Civil Rights of Latinos: [(Today, another **Hernandez v Texas** (1954) is urgently needed to reinforce the 14th Amendment's "birth-clause" as an unambiguous and clear indication of US citizenship)]:

The next momentous event affecting the *We Are You Project's* ascertainable history occurred three years after the end of the Civil War in 1868, when the **14th Amendment** to the **US Constitution** was ratified, guaranteeing citizenship to "all persons born in the United States." Yet, in 2011, the State of Alabama (and likewise earlier Arizona and other states, which have generated similar laws) passed **H.B. 56**, an ethno-racist law abridging the "privileges and immunities" of Latino citizens, thereby, denying Hispanics fair and equal legal protection(s) and benefits. Alabama's 2011 unconstitutional law **H.B. 56** went so far in its anti-Latino calumny as to deny citizenship to natural-born US-citizens.

Forlornly, due to the 21st Century's rising tide of intolerance, discrimination, unconstitutional laws and pure anti-Americanism; sadly, the broad



Gus Garcia, heroically deliberating before the US Supreme Court of Justice Earl Warren in 1954.

protective-power of the **14th Amendment** has been unable to fully safeguard US Latinos from the rampant bigotry evident in several states' anti-Latino legislative-agendas. At this time, Latinos desperately need another ground-breaking Pro-Latino Supreme Court ruling; such as the 1954 case known as **Pedro Hernandez v. The State of Texas**. This case was successfully argued, (by two valiant Tejano Lawyers, Gus Garcia and Carlos Cadena), heroically deliberating before the US Supreme Court of Chief Justice

Earl Warren in 1954. Thankfully, the high court's ruled in support of *Hernandez*, which granted Latinos for the first time in US history appropriate due process under law, extending to Latinos the full power of the US *Bill of Rights*; as well as designating Latinos as being (ethnically and racially), a "Class Apart." Today, Latinos need another case like *Hernandez v Texas* to reinforce the 14th *Admendment*'s "birth-clause" as a valid indication of US citizenship. Alabama's new law *H.B. 56* unjustly questions Latino



Raul Villarreal "No Longer (IN)Visible" 2004, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 48" x 36" (Collection of the artist).

children's US-birth right, depending on whether one or both parents are illegal aliens; such legislation relates directly to the issue of Latino identify; a pivotal concern within WAY IT'S's aesthetic parameters. The use of identity as a fulcrum for figurative imagery is evident to Cuban painter, Raul Villarreal, whose ancestral lineage includes hereditary from Taino-Culture, Africa, and Spain. As a result, in his image entitled *No Longer (IN)Visible* (acrylic & oil on canvas, 48" x 36," 2004) explores Latino identity. Additionally, this *duende*-filled self-portrait alludes to Afro-Caribbean reli-

gious motifs, particularly those associated

with Palo Monte (Palo Mayombe Religion), as well as referencing Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (published in 1952). Villarreal's art reflects Ellison's inner (immanent) psychological awareness; whereby, in order to hide; often people dissemble their identity, placing too much emphasis on what is seen and not enough on what is felt, or just under the surface. For this reason, Villarreal's self-image is

transparent, revealing at its core-essence: a vital throbbing heart. In these raw heartfelt concerns, Latinos are precisely what Earl Warren described, “A class apart!”

Among the WAY IT’S artists grappling with contemporary Latino identity is Colombian-American artist Sergio Villamizar, who juxtaposes double frontal self-portrait mug-shots (or passport-photos), wherein he uncompromisingly confronts himself (his actual facial features), his “*being*,” depicting one self-portrait with swarthy complexion and a moustache, the other with bleached skin and no moustache.



Sergio Villamizar “Before and Happily Ever After” 2006, Digital Print ,
24” x 32” (Collection of the artist).

Since so much, of what negatively confronts Latinos, pertains to immigration policies, the ambivalent and humorous irony in Villamizar’s photographic self-portraits affords little distinction between these photos possible function as *being* paradoxically perhaps “portraits,” “mug-shots,” or “passport-photos.”

The Groundbreaking Significance of the 1992 Quincentenary and the Dawn of *Latinization*:

In terms of art and culture, the *We Are You Project's* 21st Century agenda has its art historical roots in three earlier 20th Century and 21st Century Hispanic events, enterprises, and endeavors: 1). The 1992 Quincentenary awakening (or first simultaneous “coast-to-coast” *national* emergence) of US Latino art and culture, including the genesis of the term “*Latinization*,” 2). The unexpected advent of Latino Post-modernism in Cuba in 1977 and its arrival in Miami and New York in the 1980s, and 3). The first attempts at Pan-Latino Transculturalism (including the first *transcultural* Latino art movement of the 21st Century: “Neo-Latinoism”).

For anyone studying the evolution of Latino Culture, nothing is as “eye-opening” about Latino history as the 1892 400th anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the New World, which remarkably did not focus attention on US-Latinos; instead the emphasis was placed on Italian-Americans and on other non-Spanish speaking European nations, as well as marginally including such ethnic curiosities as subjugated US Amerindian tribes living “peacefully” on reservations. The nation-wide neglect of Latinos during the USA’s October 1892 400th-year celebration of the 1492 “Discovery of America by Columbus” exposes both the utter political and economic powerlessness of US Latinos in the late-19th Century, and the growing US anti-Latin mood attributable to the pending imminent war with Spain (1898), wherein American soldiers fought and died in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, etc. Or, the USA’s 1892 awareness of an inevitable confrontation with Colombia in order to secure the Panama Canal (1903), as well as other Caribbean and Central American US Marine peacekeeping incursions, throughout the 19th Century *fin de siècle*. Thus, the focus of the 1892 Commemoration of Columbus’s arrival generally spotlighted and honored Italy as Columbus’s alleged birthplace, as well as the birthplace of thousands of arriving (via Ellis Island) Italian-American immigrants.

Conversely, one hundred years later during the United States of America’s 1992 Quincentenary Celebration, for the first time (if only for one year (1992)), Latinos were properly highlighted, studied,

and noticed, rightly attaining the full focus of the USA's celebration, marking the 500-year observance of Christopher Columbus's 1492 encounter with indigenous Americans, which then sparked from the 16th Century onward "New World" and "Old World" contact(s), interactions, conflicts as well as intercourse (sexual-coupling), igniting the initial growth of North American Latino culture as well as Latin-American "Latin" culture.

The 1992 Columbus Quincentenary afforded US Latinos moments of self-realization and self-awakening, seeing (for the first time) glimpses of their bright future as US citizens. Nevertheless, the 1992 Quincentenary did provide Latinos with the first ray-of-hope that their lives in the USA might improve. For example, in this optimistic light, on Monday, October 12, 1992, at Goucher College, (Baltimore, Maryland) during an art historical lecture by the author of this essay (Dr. José Rodeiro), he used for the first time, the term "**Latinization**" to characterize the objectives of a Quincentenary Latino art show organized by Helen Glazer (the Director of Goucher College's Rosenberg Gallery), which she entitled "**Approaching the Quincentenary: Latino Art 1982-1992.**" The term **Latinization** was invented by Rodeiro to denote the inescapable growth and spread of Latino culture throughout the USA, including the inevitable 21st Century absorption of Latino culture by the US-mainstream (which shortly after 2050 CE will manifest and mark an unavoidable cultural shift) establishing the predominance in the USA of Latino values, art, music (dance), food and lifestyle.

For this reason, thanks to the Quincentenary, in-and-around the year 1992, the USA's mainstream "art world" was overtaken by the need to finally and seriously focus on Latino art and culture "**for an entire year.**" In 1992, to mark the occasion, Spain proudly sent replicas of Columbus's three tiny ships to New York City. Suddenly, all the top Latino artists were in demand for a series of groundbreaking Quincentenary Latino art exhibitions that would define the "general" nature of Latin Art to "**the present.**"

The most prestigious and ambitious show, which occurred on the eve of the Quincentenary (1987) was "**Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors,**" which featured

180 Latino works-of-art carefully curated by Jane Livingston and John Beardsley, including works by Chicano artists like Carlos Almaraz, Gilbert Lujan, Frank Romero, and Gronk. Importantly, Livingston



Frank Romero “The Arrest of the Paleteros” 1996, Oil on canvas, 8’ x 12’

and Beardsley established the Los Angelino catatonic-schizophrenic, Martin Ramirez (1885-1960) as a Latino art trailblazer. Art historically, Livingston and Beardsley wisely placed three well-known sculptors Luis Jiminéz, Robert Graham, and Manuel Neri appropriately as significant Latino art pioneers.

lowing Latino artists, e.g., from Cuba: Carlos Alfonzo, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Paul Sierra, and Pedro Perez;

or from Puerto Rico: Ibsen Espada and Arnaldo Roche-Rabell; or from South America: Ismael Frigerio and Lydia Buzio; as well as numerous Chicano and Chicana contemporary masters (beyond those already mentioned above). Many other Quincentenary-related shows



Carlos Alfonzo “Where Tears Can’t Stop” 1986, Acrylic on canvas, 8’ x 10’

Bronx Museum launched a show entitled: “***The Latin American Spirit Show;***” or UCLA’s legendary West Coast Latino “**CARA Show**” (1990-1993), as well as other significant Latin-Art exhibitions. Of all

the groundbreaking Quincentenary shows that occurred in 1992, the best was "*Approaching the Quincentenary: Latino Art 1982-1992*," organized by Helen Glazer, the Director of the Rosenberg Gallery, Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland, featuring major postmodern Latino artists, including: Cuban-American artists: Arturo Bassols, Maria Castigliola, J. Tomas Lopez, Tomas Marais, José Marin, Maria Sonia Martín, José Rodeiro; and the Puerto Rican-American artists: Maritza Davila, Peter Gaztambide, Carlos Suenos, and Chicano artist Luis Jimenez. Another major Quincentenary show occurred at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum, entitled "*Crosscurrents of Modernism: Four Latin American Pioneers*" emphasizing the top four Latin American 20th Century masters, who had, according to the Smithsonian, dominated 20th Century art: Diego Rivera (Mexico), Joaquin Torres-Garcia (Uruguay), Wilfredo Lam (Cuba) and Roberto Matta Echarren (Chile). This show provoked heated controversy due to the exclusion of Frida Kahlo.



Luis Jimenez "Vaquero" 1987, Polychrome Fiberglass, 16' x 9' x 5' (Smithsonian Collection: National Museum of American Art).

Learning from such appalling acts of gender-bias and chauvinism, as the exclusion of Frida Kahlo from the Hirshhorn's "*Crosscurrents*" Quincentenary exhibition, today, the *We Are You Project* WAY



Marta Sanchez "Retablo for Women of Juarez" 2011, Oil and enamel on metal, 36" x 24"



Rosario D'Rivera "Mujeres Unidas En Libertad" 2011, Mixed media 22" x 28" (Collection of the artist).



Josephine Barreiro "Divided We Stand" 2011, Acrylic and paper on plywood panel, 30" x 40" (Collection of the artist).

IT'S exhibit has attracted a strong coterie of eminent feminist Latina artists, i.e., Marta Sanchez, Rosario D' Rivera, Josephine Barreiro, Jacqui Casale, Maritza Davila, Lisette Morel, Ceci Castleblanco as well as others. In their images, Sanchez and Barreiro explore different aspects of Neo-Neoexpressionism from



Jacqui Casale "And the Walls Come Tumbling Down" 2011, Mixed Media, 20" x 24" (Collection of the artist).

the gritty hyper-emotive art of Barreiro to the inspired fanciful images of Sanchez; while the paintings of D'Rivera, Casale, Morel, Davila and Castleblanco create vivacious monumental lyrical abstractions that are paradoxically, at the same time, both formal and whimsical.

Postmodernism and Cuba's 'Volume I Show:'

The current *We Are You Project*'s attempt to transcend Postmodernism cannot be fully understood without considering how Latino Postmodernism first manifested. By 1977, in Havana, Cuba, the daring art *impresario*, Gerardo Mosquera began favoring art that employed found-objects, installation art, kitsch and *Santería*. By 1981, these methods dominated, a groundbreaking "island-based" Cuban exhibit known as 'Volume I,' featuring José Bedia, Rubén Torres Llorca, R. Rodríguez Brey, G. P. Monzón, and others. Critics in Cuba questioned the validity of 'Volume I' as socialist art. In the 1980s, several members and supporters of 'Volume I' fled to Mexico City, and then settled in the USA, after congregating at the Nina Menocal Gallery (Mexico). Thus, their art was termed "Ninart," e.g. T. Esson, Alberto Rey, Alvaro García, R. R. Brey, J. Bedia, A. Cuenca (the well-known photographer), C. Castaneda, Ileana Villazón, F. Gelabert (the sculptor) and R. López-Marín "Gory" (the photographer). The blanket departure of Cuba's 'Volume I' Generation to the USA, encouraged Castro's regime to reconsider its suppressive artistic policies, allowing for greater individual expression. Luckily for Cuban art in Havana, Mosquera remained on the island, organizing Cuban Biennials, these epic shows helped shape the artistic-careers of several Post-"Volume I" US-bound waves of refugee artists, as well as 'islanders.'

As more refugee artists arrived in Florida, a vibrant gallery-scene emerged in Miami. In 1983, the surge of Miami-Cuban art was the focus of the "Miami Generation" show, inaugurating the Cuban Museum of Art and Culture, Miami. Other significant Cuban-American exhibitions followed, including "Outside Cuba," 1987, "Cuba-USA," 1991, curated by Giulio Blanc, or the 'Breaking Barriers' Show, 1997, curated by Jorge Santis. Also, significant (since first attempted by Wifredo Lam in the 1940s) is the predominance in visual art of spiritual motifs relating to Santería as well as other Afro-Caribbean religions, especially among Cuban Neo-Expressionism e.g. Luis Cruz Azaceta, José Bedia, Paul Sierra, Pedro Pérez, Tomas Esson, and Carlos Alfonso (1950-1991). Since 1990, Cuban-American radical Post-modernism has merged with Neo-Surrealism and Hyperrealism; this is evident in the masterful art of

Tomás Sánchez, Jesus Rivera, as well as Raul Villarreal. Villarreal's paintings of isolated stately Royal Palm-trees that stand erect against bright blue skies or dramatic sunsets with occasional symbol-laden clouds (connoting maps of Cuba), such images express a heartbreaking nostalgia for Cuba, e.g., *With(IN) Skies*, (acrylic & oil on canvas, 30 x 60, 2005).



Raul Villarreal "With(IN) Skies" 2005, Acrylic on canvas, 30" x 60" (Collection of the artist).

Pan-Latino Transculturalism:

By 2001, the brilliant Puerto-Rican American curator Dr. Isabel Nazario (at that time, director of the Rutgers University's Center for Latino Art & Culture) began organizing a series of major comprehensive Latino exhibitions, which would evolve into the acclaimed innovative endeavor known as **The Transcultural Art Initiative** in New Jersey and New York. By thoroughly researching the top Latino artists in the New York/New Jersey region, Nazario carefully planned a series of edifying landmark Latino exhibitions, featuring (to name a few of the artists) Carolina Alvarado-Narvarete, Michele Araujo, Yolanda Avila, Hugo Bastidas, Olga Bautista, Antonio Carreño, Alphonso Corpus, Jo-Anne Echevarria-Myers, Eugenio-Espinoso, Benedict J. Fernandez, Diana Gonzalez Gandolfi, Diosmel González, Noe Hernandez, Maria Lau, Mariana Maldonado, Claudio Mir, Alexandra Morel, Raphael M. Ortiz, José Rodeiro, Fausto Sevilla, Tony Velez, Raul Villarreal and others.

During the end of the 20th Century and the start of the 21st Century, a group of creditable Latino art critics, curators, and theorists manifested, including foremost Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin*



Dr. Nicomedes
Suárez-Araúz

American Art (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980,” in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*. Also, contributing to the growing realm of Latino *contemporary* “art-ideas” were Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz, Shifra Goldman, Alejandro Anreus, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, Isabel Nazario, Rosario Aranda Alvarado, Denise Carvalho and José Rodeiro.

Isabel Nazario’s **The Transcultural Art Initiative** (2001-2005) encouraged a phenomenon known as the “Neo-Latino Art Movement.” In 2003, the name for this phenomenon (“Neo-Latino”) was invented by Cuban artist Raul Villarreal to describe a cluster of New York City Metropolitan-area artists, who advocated nascent rudimentary-forms of Pan-Latino *transculturalism*. From 2003 until 2006, this group dominated New York/New Jersey’s Latino Art scene, participating in scores of major regional ex-



Neo-Latino exhibition at the Harold B. Lemmerman Gallery (NJCU), artists Hugo Morales, Raniel Guzman, Gallery Director Midori Yoshimoto, NJCU President Carlos Hernandez, artist Gerardo Castro, and artist, art historian, and coordinator of Art History at NJCU Dr. José Rodeiro.

hibitions. The core group included Olga Cruz (the leader), Josephine Barreiro, Hugo X. Bastidas, Olga Mercedes Bautista, Gerardo Castro, Leandro Flaherty, Raniel Guzman, Hugo W. Morales, Jason Rivera, José Rodeiro, Raúl Villarreal, Sergio Villamizar, and William Coronado, as well as others.



Hugo Xavier Bastidas "Bearing Gifts" 2009, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36" (Via The Nohra Haime Gallery).

A growing awareness of Latino transculturalism permeated early-21st Century Hispanic art and culture. For example, along with Mexican master Roberto Márquez, Ecuadorian-American artist, Hugo Xavier Bastidas is considered one of the top Latino artists working in the United States. In the early 21st Century, Bastidas was one of the founding Neo-Latino artists, who in 2009 along with Josephine Barreiro, Gerardo Castro, Hugo W. Morales, Sergio Villamizar, Williams Coronado, José Rodeiro and Raul Villarreal joined the *We Are You Project's* *WAY IT'S* initiative; for which he generated an extraordinary oil painting entitled *Bearing Gifts*, analyzing the human cost of crossing the Rio Grande into "El Norte." Bastidas's painting provides an ironic insight into the tragic nature of illicit border-crossings. First, the title contains the word "Bearing," which relates to an image (in the center of the composition) of a discarded toy bear accidentally dropped on a patch of cacti by a child during a traumatic run across the Rio Grande. The word "Bearing" also connotes "conveyance," since undocumented-alien frequently carry all

their prized-belongings on their journey. Lastly, the word is a pun on the name of Vitus Bering, the Danish sea-captain employed by the Russian Navy of Czar Peter the Great. Captain Bering was ordered to find a Pacific Ocean route from Russia to Mexico. In 1725, he accidentally discovered the Bering Straits, the prehistoric passageway by which the ancient Amerindians presumably arrived in *all* the Americas. Via his brown-sepia image of a lost toy bear, Bastidas brilliantly reverses the concept of courageous *journeying*, *discovery*, and *exploration*, by conceding these heroic qualities to illegal immigrants and their daring attempts to enter the US illicitly. Also, significant to Bastidas's image are *Amnesis* aesthetic ideas inherent in Bolivian poet Nícomedes Suárez-Araúz's *Theory of the Lost Object*.

A 21st Century Longing for a Latino Renaissance:

As the 21st Century emerged, Hispanics from the Pacific Coast to the Atlantic Coast hungered for a 21st Century US-Latino Renaissance, realizing that such a cultural renewal would in all likelihood invigorate the whole US-art scene. By 2010, the longing for a Renaissance increased; especially, after the Islamo-fascist attacks of 9/11/2001, and the resulting excruciating and interminable US-led "War on Terror" that indirectly effected the US-economic collapse of 2007- 2008. During *this* dark time, much of mainstream US visual art generally favored various *postformal* and *a-formal* approaches to art-making. These were mostly anti-creative methodologies that were mostly "un-visual," and by-and-large hyper-conceptual, mechanical, inhuman, *ersatz*, sheer technology, text-based, inauthentic, anti-art (Neo-Dada/ Neo-Fluxus), invisible and un-emotive. These early-21st Century hyper-conceptual methods espoused the current Western academic "anti-art" dogma. Yet, during this sad period in the history of art (which is best exemplified by the last two Whitney Biennials); Latino art courageously bucked all effortless anti-art trends, and continued to bravely emphasize the visual-nature of visual art; perhaps resulting as Gertrude Stein argued in *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937) from an "innate" Iberian awareness of their unique intensely ocular *Hispano*-art history, which persistently and historically insists that visual art must be first

and foremost VISUAL! For this reason, certainly any feasible and viable 21st Century US-Latino Renaissance would require firm art historical grounding, necessitating a sweeping and expansive cosmic historical overview of US Latino culture and art from 1492 until today. Notably, the *We Are You Project* is currently undertaking such a valorous, bold, sweeping and expansive art historical overview of Latino art from the early-16th Century onward.

Among aestheticians anticipating a 21st Century Latino reinvigoration of all the arts was the Bolivian-born poet and theorist Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz, whose book *Amnesia: The Art of the Lost Object* (1988) propounded a new and influential concept, based on amnesia as a structural metaphor for creativity, viewing the realm of the forgotten as both the essential source and the elemental form of all artistic creativity and fabulation. In the 21st Century, according to critic Sunka Simon, *Amnesia* remains a growing aesthetic concern. Also, significant to this highly desired emergence of a Latino Renaissance was the surfacing in 2010 of the *We Are You Project's* **WE ARE YOU INTERNATIONAL TRAVELING SHOW (*WAY IT'S*)**, which was initiated by Dr. Carlos Hernandez (President, New Jersey City University (NJCU)); Mr. Mario Tapia (President and CEO, Latino Center on Aging (LCA)), and Duda Penteadó, (a Brazilian contemporary artist living in the New York's metropolitan-area).

THE WE ARE YOU INTERNATIONAL TRAVELING SHOW (“*WAY IT'S*”):

Starting in the late-1990s, Duda Penteadó, (who, along with Vik Muniz and Romero Britto, is one of the most celebrated Brazilian artists working in the USA), slowly began to envision a unique Latino global *visual-art* initiative, reflecting a revolutionary concept that would transform and facilitate new activism, and socio-political renewal, and unification among all Latinos: “Pan-Latino Transculturalism.” The heroic first steps in this venture began in 1997, when Penteadó met Dr. Carlos Hernandez, a prominent New Jersey Latino university president with almost 40 years of service in American higher education. Then, in 2000, Penteadó met Mr. Mario Tapia (President and CEO, Latino Center on Aging (LCA)), who joined this key initial group of Latino “cultural-visionaries.” Tapia had devoted over thirty

-years of his life to helping Latinos throughout the New York metropolitan-area, as well as nationally and internationally. Both of these men had a profound impact upon Penteado's rising concern for the com-



Duda Penteado, Brazilian artist

plex milieu surrounding the lives of most US-Latinos, affecting a growing notion (within him) that the USA was in dire need of radical cultural and artistic reforms. Thus, at the dawn of the 21st Century, Hernández, Tapia, and Penteado saw a clear and pressing opportunity for a thorough overhaul of American culture in order to properly accommodate the USA's growing Latino populace. They saw the possibility of a volcanic paradigm-shift that would reinvigorate all of America's art, education, political-activism,

health-care, immigration policy and encourage a "new" comprehensive and "hands-on" or "ground-level" social-work system that would properly meet community-needs in a straightforward manner, as well as the thorough review of US and global socio-economic structures and other vital issues, which they



Dr. Carlos Hernandez, NJCU President



Mr. Mario Tapia (President and CEO, Latino Center on Aging LCA).

(Hernández and Tapia) deemed necessary for the improvement and transformation of 21st Century and 22nd Century American culture and life.

By 2001, Hernández and Tapia pointed out to Penteado that US-Latino culture in the urban environment was undergoing dramatic renovation (s) that permitted greater transcultural Latino unity (e.g., Pan-Hispano transculturalism and ***Latinization***, as well as the prospect a broad socio-economic transformation, including introducing within the US a completely

"New Latino" identity or ***persona*** capable of greater access into the ***American Dream***, mainstream US-

culture, and socio-economic success, which was (at that time and even now) to some extent only available *generally* to “well-educated” Latinos. Most importantly, they believed that the arts were central component or a crucial ingredient of such a Renaissance.

As the “War on Terror” ensued after the attacks of 9/11/2001, many Latinos became the front-line military cohort fighting the Mid-Eastern conflict. Due to the 9/11 attacks, the US began to tighten its border-security, which affected primarily Latinos. Consequently, this post-9/11 US paranoia (with its unexpected targeting of Latin immigrants) fostered a new Hispanics civil-rights awareness. And, by means of emergent transculturalism, Latinos of different ethnicities and national-origins were finding common ground, and greater Pan-Latino unity. As a result, Tapia, Hernández, and Penteado began to notice that “Latinization” was gaining momentum, attaining greater prominence (in US popular-culture), as well as making strong headway within various US financial arenas, while advancing Latin art and culture deeper-&-deeper into the American mainstream, fermenting new and daring Pan-Hispano ideas (i.e., Neo-Latinoism, transculturalism, cultural-hybridization and other concepts associated with *the* prevalent 21st Century “Latino Condition”), evolving and manifesting as a growing transcultural phenomenon throughout *all* American society, effecting every aspects of US culture. This mounting surge of “*Latinization*” crystallized in 2005, when Penteado was selected to design the official poster for the 2nd National Conference on Latino Aging, for which he boldly created an expressionistic symbol (or an emblem) capable of embodying the spirit of America’s new-Latino identity. In June 2005, the poster was first unveiled, during LCA’s 13th Golden Age Awards banquet in New York City, during the dedication, Tapia delineated that Latinos were attaining a new status in the 21st Century; which led him to pronounce, “We Are the USA.” An idea that Penteado immediately took to heart and brilliantly refashioned into the concept known as: “We Are You,” which became the title of Penteado’s art work.

Soon the *We Are You Project’s* 2012-2018 global initiative known as the “*We Are You International Traveling Show*” (“*WAY IT’S*”) appeared as a reality. Art historically, the *WAY IT’S* arose from

the tragic confluence of several epic-events and the “ongoing” dilemma precipitated by those sad events ((described below)). From 2005 onward, as more-and-more Latinos exerted themselves and flourished in the USA and in the world, attaining recognition and wealth. However, unexpectedly, an anti-Latino backlash arose, which was sparked by growing ethno-racism energized by “fear-fueled” apprehension, mistrust, envy and paranoia (trepidation), deriving from and concerning the 2007-2008 collapse of the United States’ economy, which unleashed a torrent of anti-Latino bias and intolerance, reaching its apogee in Arizona in 2009, followed by a series of Anti-Latino laws that were enacted in four states (mostly in Arizona, as well as Oklahoma, Missouri, and Alabama), with the most draconian occurring in Alabama in 2011. The worst provisions of these new laws blatantly violate the US-Constitution, e.g., the revoking of any US-born Latino citizen’s “*citizenship*,” if either both or any one parent is proven to be undocumented. Sadly, additional anti-Hispanic laws are under consideration in other states (i.e., Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, etc.). From 2009 onward, Latinos more-and-more were being designated *personas non grata* in the USA; or identified as scapegoats for all that ailed America.

The fact that Latinos were suddenly being noticed led to the awareness of the growing importance of US Hispanics. This growing realization sparked a large-scale Latino Conference in April, 2010 at NJCU that would examine every aspect of Latino culture and life. As part of this Latino Conference, a panel was composed on the topic of contemporary art moderated by Dr. Carlos Hernández entitled *Art as a Catalyst for Social Change: “WE ARE YOU.”* Participating, in the event, along with Duda Penteadó, was Dr. José Rodeiro [(Coordinator of Art History at NJCU, and an acclaimed artist and scholar)], and other speakers were involved in the panel, including art historian Dr. Sara Gil Ramos (Adjunct-Professor at NJCU) and curator and scholar Fausto Quintanilla, Gallery Director, Queensborough Community College Art Gallery, NYC, NY). As part of the aftermath of this conference, Penteadó asked Rodeiro, as well as Robert Rosado (the Union City (NJ) Puerto Rican *impresario*), and Raul Villarreal (the prominent metropolitan-area Cuban artist) to form a subcommittee to explore avenues by which topnotch Latino artists might join the *We Are You Project*.

Soon an array of thirty prominent Latino artists from the full-breadth ((coast to coast)) of the USA, as well as Latin America manifested, answering the “CALL,” which was promulgated online (and is currently visible on the *We Are You* Project Website). The thirty that answered the call were endowed with hereditary national ancestries or heritage from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, The Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Brazil, and Spain, etc. Thus, the exhibiting artists of the *We Are You International Traveling Show (WAY IT’S)* materialized throughout 2010 and 2011. The artists that joined *WAY IT’S* were involved in the following innovative and “cutting-edge” current Latino styles: “Neo-*neo*expressionism,” “Metaphorical Realism,” “Mystic-Lyricism” (“Eye-opener Art”), “Neo-Metaphysical/Urban-Assemblage Art,” “Neo-Ultraism” (“Infra-realism”), and “Neo-Pop.” For example,



Jose Acosta “Hispanic Pride” 2011, Acrylic on canvas, 24” x 32” (Collection of the artist).

among the *WAY IT’S* cohort is a dazzling coterie of artists pursuing 21st Century Neo-neoexpressionism; this group includes: José Acosta, Josephine Barreiro, Duda Pentead, Marta Sanchez; plus, occasionally Hugo Morales (whenever he is creating additional expressionistic works for his ongoing hyper-emotive *Silent Scream Series*); in addition, within this

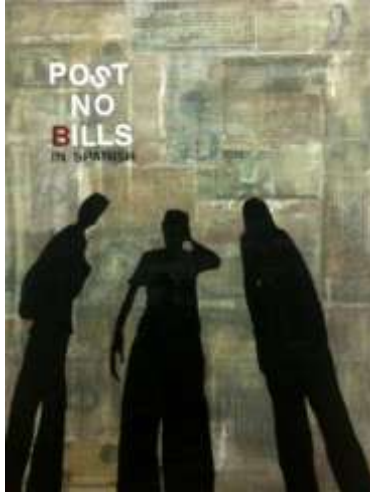
the urban industrial landscape Cuban artist, Nelson Alvarez.

However, art historically, Alvarez’s *WAY IT’S* submission for the exhibition, (a floor-piece entitled *Imaginary Border* (diptych)), has a certain “Neo-HairyWho” aspects, as well as functioning within the context of Neo-Metaphysical “Urban-Assemblage Art.”

Another stylistic-method perceptible in the *WAY IT’S* exhibition is “Metaphorical Realism.” Mimetically and poetically, this particular “visual-narrative” mode connects symbolic representa-



Hugo Morales “Untitled-Silent Scream Series” 2004, Acrylic on canvas.



Willie Báez "Post No Bills in Spanish" 2011, Acrylic on paper Collage, 24" x 18" (Collection of the artist).



Roberto Márquez "Map of Mexico" 2011, Oil on canvas, 34" x 24" (Collection of the artist).



Joe Pena "Elisa, M.N." 2011, Oil on canvas, 10" x 10" (Collection of the artist).

tional-imagery (*mimesis*) to “visualization” or story-telling: fabulation. There are a dozen **WAY IT’S** artists that create unique iconological narratives, whose style is “generally” identified with a radical postmodern style known as “Metaphorical Realism,” e.g., Willie Báez, Hugo Bastidas, Gerardo Castro, Williams Coronado, Roberto Marquez, Raphael Montanez Ortiz, Joe Pena, Jimmy Pena, Jesus Rivera,



Jimmy Pena "Esfuerzo" 2004, Print, 24" x 55" (Collection of the artist)

José Rodeiro, and Raúl Villarreal. On the other hand, a bevy of **WAY IT’S** artists are experimenting with Mystic-Lyricism (or “Eye-opener Art”); these are Fernando Goldoni, Rolando Reyna,



Carlos Chavez "Trabajadores de la Tierra" 2011, Oil on canvas, 14" x 42" (Collection of the artist).

Jacqui Casale, and Lissette Morel. While another *transvanguard* **WAY IT'S** coterie consists of Carlos Chavez, Pablo Caviedes, Rosario D'Rivera, and Sergio Villamizar, which are developing innovative Neo-Surreal styles, i.e., Neo-Ultraist works [(or Infra-realist works)] or Immanentist imagery. There are



Pablo Caviedes "On the Map" 2011, Acrylic on canvas, 40" x 40" (Collection of the artist).



Fernando Goldini "CHANGE Melts an Ideal" 2002 Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30" (Private collection).

elements of "Neo-Magic Realism" in Immanentism, Infra-realism, Neo-Ultraism, and Metaphorical Realism. Additionally, within the WAY IT'S's gamut of styles, there are two towering Latino Neo-Pop

artists exhibiting in the show: Hugo Morales (with his amusing *Dora* image) and Julio Nazario (with his poignant *Purple Heart* image).



Hugo Morales “*Dora*” 2010, Digital Image, 24” x 18” (Collection of The Council on Hispanic Affairs (CHA)).

Thus, the above *WAY IT’S* images and themes examine the plight of US Latinos caught in the throes of the current *on-going* “Great Recession” that began in 2007-2008; an economic downturn that is ensnared in the wake of *the* events of 9/11/2001 with its concomitant incessant War on Terror, leading directly and indirectly to the upheavals of the Arab-Spring (2011) and the growing international “Occupy Wall Street Movement” (2011), wherein both struggles, many Latin Americans, US Latinos, Spaniards and Portuguese stand on the front lines striving for Middle Eastern freedom and democracy, as well as a complete overhaul of Wall Street banking and investment practices.

Equally important are the growing new Latino civil rights struggle(s) against injustice(s), such as the recent Arizona “Immigration Law” *SB1070*, which expands statewide police-powers to stop, question, and detain anyone who looks slightly Hispanic, instantly demanding that they produce papers, in order to prove that they are allowed to be in the USA; or, the more draconian Anti-Latino law recently (2011) passed in Alabama (H.B. 56). Whether in Arizona or Alabama, even natural-born “Hispanic-looking” citizen are subject to this unfair treatment. Such negative Anti-Latino attitudes have also been put forward by legislatures in Georgia, Virginia, and Oklahoma, etc., etcetera.



Julio Nazario “*The Convoy in Lilac*” 2011, Mixed media/B&W photograph on handmade paper, 20” x 24” (Collection of the artist).

Also, in contention against (or with) basic “**We Are You**” values are the string of additional “anti-American” laws [(one-after-another)] that Arizona recently passed, including: **SB 1070 bill**; **SB 1096 bill**; **HB 2631bill**, and especially the deeply troubling and abhorrent **HB 2281 bill**, which would make it illegal in Arizona for school districts to teach courses in “Ethnic Studies,” “Hispanic Studies,” or “Latino Studies,” etc. Viewing this entire glut of recent anti-Hispanic legislation as “ethno-racist,” and primarily hate-driven, the **WAY Project** believes that Latino artists and their art must assume the role of strong advocates for the needs and rights of all Americans’ upholding the original spirit of The Bill of Rights (1789). Moreover, the **We Are You Project’s WAY IT’S** global venture is not pleased by all the senseless and environmentally dangerous walls, which are blighting the US/Mexican border.

Importantly, the **We Are You Project’s WAY IT’S** exhibition has both a USA component and a Latin American component. The US-component is an attempt to employ art as a symbolic-mirror reflecting the lives of US-Latinos during an era of escalating anti-Hispanic rhetoric, violence, segregation, unfair-legislation and injustice. The Latin American component longs to place greater attention on art and culture throughout all of the **Americas**, as well as spotlighting parallel US and Latin American socio-political struggles generated by rapid economic emergence and globalization. Consequently, in order to inaugurate the 2012-2018 global tour of the **We Are You International Traveling Show (WAY IT’S)**, plans are underway for initial exhibitions that are set to open in 2012. The inaugural exhibition will occur in spring 2012, in New York City, at the renowned Wilmer Jennings Gallery (an affiliate of Kenkelaba House); this first exhibit will be followed by a venue in fall 2012 at the Arts Guild New Jersey (Rahway, NJ) that will coincide with the fall-2012’s national “Hispanic Heritage Celebrations.” Check the **We Are You Project’s** Website for information regarding these initial **WAY IT’S** 2012 exhibitions: <<http://www.weareyouproject.org/6201.html>>.

For all the above reasons, the highly anticipated **WAY IT’S** touring exhibition is one of the most comprehensive and insightful contemporary Latino art show ever assembled; presenting key Hispanic

art-works from a dozen Latin American nations, exhibiting unique 2-D subjects that broadly examine the following difficult Hispanic concerns: immigration, ***Latinization***, discrimination, Pan-Latin transculturalism, as well as identifying all the myriad facets of Latino cultural identity as well as focusing on recent glaring examples within various US state-governments of rampant ***Latinophobia***, including vivid examples of widespread clandestine and private anti-Latino activities that are occurring in 21st Century America. Hence, the ***We Are You*** Project uses art to symbolically shed “***Liberty’s***” *Laboulayean*-light on all of the raging “anti-American” abuses and violations of basic societal civil rights, which have been recently fomented by both ethno-racist state-governments (i.e., Arizona, Alabama, etc.) and individuals, who are unfortunately mired in extremism and injustice. During the growing 21st Century anti-Hispanic crisis in the USA, the ***WAY IT’S*** artists are recognized as fresh ‘New Latino’ voices that demand justice for Latinos, as well as heroic agents for equitable systemic change. In their desire to uphold the ***US Constitution***; the ***US Bill of Rights***, the ***14th Amendment*** and vital historic Supreme Court decisions; and through their vigorous Pro-Latino artistic-activism, and their yearning to improve the socio-economic, cultural, artistic and political lot of both US-Latinos as well as all Latin Americans, the ***WAY IT’S*** artists employ art as a both a catalyst for social change, and a “***WAY***” to champion Latino civil rights, believing that by so doing inevitably the rights of all Americans from Tierra del Fuego to Hudson Bay will be preserved, because WE ARE YOU.

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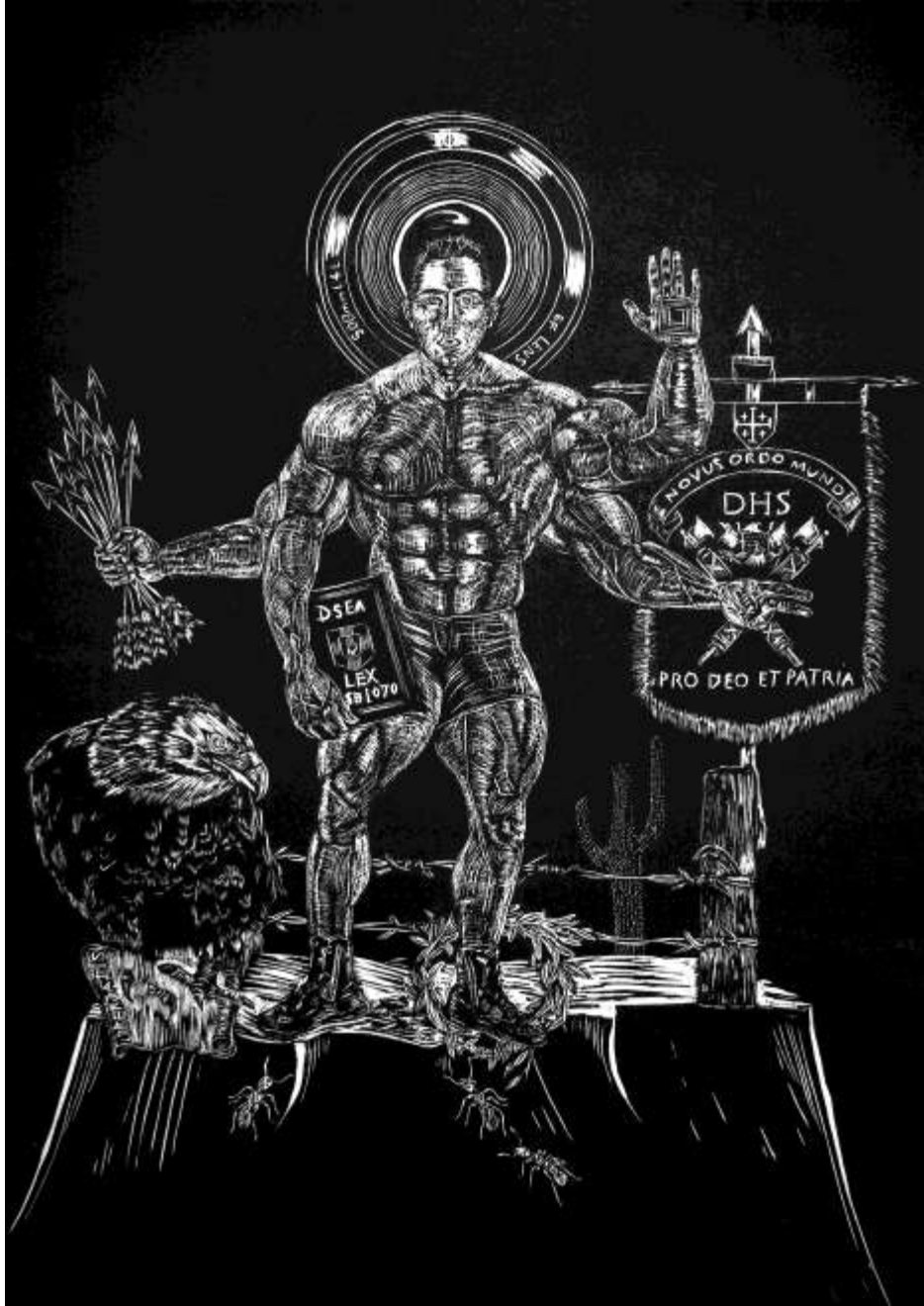
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Sergio Villamizar “Saint Patriot” 2011, 18” x 24” Woodcut (Collection of the artist).

Saint Patriot is part of a series that critically explores American culture and politics, utilizing hybrid symbols derived from Medieval and Byzantine icons. Villamizar’s Saint Patriot (The Patron Saint of Patriotism) represents our alleged need to protect our way of life, to fight terrorism, and ultimately to get rid-of “the other(s).” The *duende*-filled image questions our foreign policy of war and our domestic policy of harassment and discrimination, i.e., the Patriot Act and Arizona’s anti immigration law SB-1070. Villamizar’s image Saint Patriot questions what it is to be a patriot, and questions such rash “right-wing” statements as, “Real Americans,” “Good Americans,” “Take back our country,” etc. Brilliantly, Villamizar asks “What are we willing to accept in the name of patriotism? Can we stomach the loss of our civil rights? Must we have microchips embedded in our hands?”