Chispai, Spanish for spark, a term used for someone with an inner fire, a “fire-brand.” These three Latinx artists have ignited a fire that has illuminated and had a profound effect socially and artistically in their own immediate community and beyond. Two Mexican-Americans, Alfredo Quirtz of Tucson, Arizona, and César Martínez of San Antonio, Texas, and one Mexican of American descent, Antonio Turek, have each developed their highly personalized vision working in relative isolation, working away from the so-called “art centers” with their focus on their immediate “minority community.” Quirtz and Martínez have focused on the Mexican-American community in the United States, while Turek has focused on the indigenous community of Chisapas, Mexico.

All are dealing with a communities’ attempt to retain and evolve its culture in transition, and all use cultural references and artistic elements of that community. For example, Alfredo Quirtz’s painting No Soy Chicoano Soy Artiano and references in his work to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which in 1848 made Mexican aliens in their own land, are especially relevant with today’s anti-immigrant hysteria. In the case of César Martínez, he uses a south Texas icon, curandero Don Pedro Jaramillo, Mexican religious icons (the Virgin of Guadalupe), votive candles as well as the pre-Columbian references that Quirtz also uses. In Antonio Turek’s Fiesta de Santa Maria there is a wonderful clash and assimilation of cultural symbols visible in the Maya men’s “sticks of authority” and the cans of coca-cola. The image is layered with ironies, since the ingredients for the product that is a symbol of U.S. imperialism are indigenous ingredients with ritualistic uses since pre-Columbian times. In Turek’s case the community’s issues go beyond cultural identity to physical survival and evolution.

The three have very different approaches. César Martínez uses a synthesis of South Texas, Mexican, European and American images to create images that are a hybrid of all. His Screent in South Texas (La Llorona) combines Edward Munch’s scream with the waiting Mexican folk legend and the trip...
format alludes to European religious works: this effect is further reinforced by the votive candles. Conco Christmas Buck (South Texas), Laccaud equates the South Texas hunting tradition with the primal cave paintings in Europe and is a testament to a friendship and a culture. Niki and Venus de San Antonio brings the famous Greek images to South Texas and appropriates them. In effect he says, “we’ve got our Venus too, but ours has arms and looks Mexican.” In Papac de Colmillo (Brids with Bite) his reference is a pre-Columbian work, with its focus on the duality of the Aztec world, a yin-yang world of opposites. I also see in his use of carefully selected discarded material, a kind of parallel with the Mexican-American culture in Texas and the Southwest. His use of this material that has “a history” and incorporating it with oil paint makes it, as well as the culture, “valuable” and gives the work a timeless beauty.

Alfred Quinto’s satirical-on-your-face-commentary on U.S. culture uses a cartoonish approach with humor and wit. In his Da Grade Kominie-Hule-Amer (Reagan) and Ask Nit… (Kennedy) he lampoons two U.S. presidents that we Americans idolize. “English Rule” refers to Anglo domina-

In the southwest, English only laws, and painful personal experiences. The self-portrait No Soy Chicano, Soy Artiano is specifically about identity and combines elements of Mexican and American cultures. His use of what are thought of as bright garish colors by U.S. standards reflect a Mexican sensibility and his aggressive painting style and forms reflect the energy and frenzy of life on the border.

Antonio Tovar comes out of a strong tradition of Mexican photography. His famous often reproduced image of a young woman revolutionary in a ski mask, Mujer Zapata, goes beyond portraying the communities’ strength and determination. She becomes a symbol for a new Mexican feminism and idealism. His Kifernia Cactus shows us what we all know about the oil industry and indigenous communities, but prefer not to see or think about. While in Ano Nuevo en San Cristobal we have more reality than we want to know about the movement. These are powerful images of a community in transition. His quote “I longed to change things and at the same time to stop the clock,” reveals not only the complexi-

I selected these artists because they are artists dealing with those issues of identity that have preoccupied me. They are artists who identify with and want to make a dif-

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