

apex

Chispa

Curated by Luis Jimenez

César Martínez
Alfred J. Quiróz
Antonio Turok

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Apex Art Curatorial Program
291 Church Street
New York, NY 10013
212 431-5270 ph
212 431-4447 fx
info@apexart.org
www.apexart.org

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work. We are fortunate that such a space exists and
encourages the dialogue that it does.

Cover: Antonio Turok *Fiesta de Santa Marra* (detail) 1973
black and white photo 39 x 59 in.



Chispa, Spanish for spark, a term used for someone with an inner fire, a “fire-brand.” These three latino 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, Alfred Quiróz of Tucson, Arizona, and César Martínez of San Antonio, Texas, and one Mexican of American descent, Antonio Turok, 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.” Quiróz and Martínez have focused on the Mexican-American community in the United States, while Turok has focused on the indigenous community of Chiapas, 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, Alfred Quiróz’s painting *No Soy Chicano Soy Aztlan* and references in his work to the treaty of Guadalupe Hildgo, which in 1848 made Mexicans 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 Pedrito Jarmillo, Mexican religious icons (the Virgin of Guadalupe), votive candles as well as the pre-Columbian references that Quiróz also uses. In Antonio Turok’s *Fiesta de Santa Maria* there is a wonderful clash and



César Martínez *Nike and Venus de San Antonio* 1997
Wood construction with incised images and mixed media 64 x 64 in.

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 Turok’s case the community’s issues go beyond cultural identity to physical survival and revolution.

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 *Scream in South Texas* (La Llorona) combines Edward Munch’s scream with the wailing Mexican folk legend and the triptych



César Martínez *Pajaros De Colmillito (Birds With Bite)* 1999
Mixed media on metal construction 64 x 64 in.

format alludes to European religious works: this effect is further reinforced by the votive candles. *Conos Christmas Buck (South Texas Lascaux)* equates the South Texas hunting tradition with the primal cave paintings in Europe and is a testament to a friendship and a culture. *Nike 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 *Pajaros de Colmillio* (Birds with Bite) his reference is a pre-Columbian work, with its focus on the duality of the Aztec world, a ying-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 Quiróz's satirical-on-your-face-commentary on U.S. culture uses a cartoonish approach with humor and wit. In his *Da Grate Kommie-Nuke-Ater* (Reagan) and *Ask Not...* (Kennedy) he lampoons two U.S. presidents that we Americans idolize. "English Rule" refers to anglo domina-

Alfred J. Quiróz *Da Grate Kommie-Nuke-Ater* 1997-98
Oil on mahogany panel 144 x 144 in.



tion in the southwest, English only laws, and painful personal experiences. The self-portrait *No Soy Chicano, Soy Aztlano* 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 Turok comes out of a strong tradition of Mexican photography. His famous often reproduced image of a young woman revolutionary in a ski mask, *Mujer Zapatista*, goes beyond portraying the communities' strength and determination. She becomes a symbol for a new Mexican feminism and idealism. His *Refineria 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 complexity of the social situation, but tells of his intentions.



Antonio Turok *Mujer zapatista (Zapatista woman)* 1994
b / w photo 8 x 10 in.

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 difference in their community, and *compadres* who I have great respect for; who strive for artistic excellence while being less concerned with national and international trends and the McDonaldization of the Contemporary Art World.

Luis Jimenez
Hondo, NM
1 February 2000



Alfred J. Quiróz *¡No Soy Chicano, Soy Aztlano!*
(Self-portrait) 1997-98 Oil on canvas 60 x 46 in.