

**TheADVOCATE**

## Celebrating Hispanic art: Rich Forum welcomes artists from around the world

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"Arte Colorido y Vibrante" at the Stamford Center for the Arts highlights the current National Hispanic Heritage Month. Under the aegis of a common ethnicity, the show puts us in a double bind-- first by celebrating the work of a specific culture then alternately defining the art as "Hispanic." The work, if mixed with a multicultural, intergenerational exhibit, would strongly stand on its own, perhaps letting us go beyond the restrictive "Latino Art" to just creative expression. Nonetheless, cultural celebrations are perfect vehicles to understand our greater metropolitan area melting pot.

The show is at the Rich Forum and the Palace Theatre in Stamford. Work at the Rich Forum, the focus of this review, was generally figurative, surreal and emotionally charged.

The overly surreal work of Carlos Arias is graphically mesmerizing with content that borders on painful. "Giros Fugases" from his series, "Mi Vida," transforms tears into waterfalls, stretches back the lid of a giant eye with a hand and squeezes body parts onto every inch of the canvas that is interspersed with large and small eyes.

One woman has closed desk drawers built into her backside; a hand is roots of a tree. The voluminous imagery locks the viewer into a visual, circuitous route.

In "Portal" by Fausto Tabora, corporeal arms diagonally reach out from a confining square suggesting the Christ figure with partial thorns around an obliterated face. Architectural post and lintel are superimposed in between an exaggerated rib cage; the entire canvas has dripped in "blood" splashed over the mostly bronze colors. It's the viewer's guess if the body is being pulled down through the portal or emerging from it.

Rosa Colon reshapes pressed flowers into cardinal birds. These two delicate pieces beg a closer look, transforming one natural material to depict another. A corn husk is recast as bark and the materials fool and delight the eye while the textures convey meticulous handling. In Colon's oil work, "Bamboo Forest," long tree trunks place us in a silent bamboo forest with simple banded trees that lend to a sense of strength.

Arnaldo Ugarte's abstract expressionist self-portrait is a welcome relief from the mostly figurative work in the show. Thick, crusted primary colors create a split, two-sided face that emerges from a dance of



terse curves and lines reminiscent of an ancient language. One side of the face is orange, the other deep purple; the nose divides into green and blue under a splatter of orange. The small, vibrant work instantly evokes the dichotomous integration of one culture into another.

Reflecting the infectious Latin beat are the canvases by Norey Agudelo and Ernesto Camacho. In Agudelo's "Illusions of Youth," a naked woman blithely splays her fingers on a keyboard, two similarly diminutive figures perch nearby. Long, rounded limbs contrast the small round, dotted flowers cascading from the woman's head down to the floor, covering her body. Aztec eyes (as in all the work by Agudelo) are accentuated by geometric extensions as if pulled out by illusionary winds.

Camacho's realism in "Red Bird Blues" features a sax, drums and acoustic bass belting out the Habaneras beat on a subway platform competing with the screeches of the approaching No. 6 train. Rays of sunlight sparse down from street vents directly on the musicians, spotlighting performers whose stage can be anywhere. The piece is from Camacho's "Subway Series," which includes the piece, "Bag Ladies," an engrossing canvas on which a young, beautiful Latina is squatting on the bottom step of the subway stairs. Next to her are a worn brown bag and a red apple. The woman, holding a cup, gazes straight at us, expressionless. Climbing the steps and nearing the top with her back to us is a sleekly dressed woman holding a chic shopping bag. Camacho connects both ladies, if only momentarily: Bags being the deciphering key to the haves and the have-nots.

Two intimate men dressed as circus clowns are beguiling in their masquerade in Ivan Fiallos' "La Grasia del Carin." One young man is staring at us while the second presses his profile into the other's cheek. Levels of disbelief prevail not only in how these impersonating characters relate, but also in how the canvas tricks the eye with a superficial, crumpled surface painted into, but seemingly over the image. Looming in the background is a lighthouse, swirling from front to back are larger-than-life floating oranges.

Sculpture varies from traditional materials to lyrical combos. In Dario Rivera Trejo's "Reclining Woman," a marble, armless torso of a woman reveals a bulbous belly that slopes down to broad, fish lips, a metaphor for a woman's sexual organ.

The bronze base of Arnaldo Ugarte's "Dancing Girl" sprouts a plume of feathers from the dancer's head, each different size and color. His sleek "Snail" is white alabaster suggesting a subtle Mayan, geometric shape.

This is the second year the show was curated by Valerie Cooper of the Stamford-based "Picture That." All in all, the exhibition encompasses local, regional and international artists from Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

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"Arte Colorido y Vibrante" will run through Oct. 27 at the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Gallery at the Rich Forum, 307 Atlantic St., Stamford. Hours are Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. 977-8203 or [www.picture-that.com](http://www.picture-that.com).

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