

**Enrique Chagoya: Boderlandia**  
**Berkeley Art Museum**  
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The first major retrospective of Enrique Chagoya's work, exhibited at the Berkeley Art Museum, provides a splendid opportunity to take in the full range of his diverse and penetrating practice. From painting to drawings, printmaking to bookmaking, Chagoya has used a number of methodologies to address complex political and cultural issues, without ever allowing the clashes of traditions and cultures that make up his subject matter resolve into some smooth aesthetic compromise.

The earliest works in the exhibition are Chagoya's "Editorials," oversized canvasses of red, black, and white, addressing the politics of Reagan-era cultural imperialism. "When Paradise Arrived" (1988), for instance, features an enormous black Mickey Mouse hand with the words "English only" written on the middle finger, preparing to flick a much smaller immigrant girl. The bold and simple strokes of black and red paint cut across the canvasses with a kind of violent brio, as cultural signifiers clash in what Chagoya calls "Aztec dialectics," a kind of hybridity that is decidedly *not* a peacefully integrated multicultural pluralism subsumed under the melting-pot mythos of "America." Instead, the contestatory relations between mainstream American society and Amerindian and Latino culture remain in ongoing struggle, waged at the symbolic "*boderlandia*" of the imagination.

Chagoya may be best known locally for his imaginative codices, which investigate early book-making as well as providing a kind of *neuvo-comix* for his particular brand of postcolonial wit. Each codex uses traditional paper-making, with overlaid prints, text, and drawings providing a kind of counter-narrative to the "written by the winners" school of historiography. These also function as an innovative combination of narrative painting and sculptural book-art, wherein no one genre can contain such fugitive histories. "Return of the Macrobiotic Cannibal," for example is a hilarious farce that incorporates what appear to be purloined texts on the stereotypical Mexican immigrant, within a palimpsest of pop and multi-cultural imagery layered over historical maps, drawings, and the like. Related prints use a similar technique, "over-writing" on early colonial texts and prints, as if to burden early colonial print culture with its historical legacies.

Perhaps the most ambitious paintings in the exhibit were a number of large canvasses that address the clashes—cultural, political, and aesthetic—between the West and indigenous and Latino cultures. In these works, Chagoya charts what he terms a "reverse anthropology," putting Western culture—both high and low—on display, in all its own exotic plumages and practices. American comic-book superheroes clash with Aztec deities, and cannibals prepare to battle UN battleships, as the once and future Amerindian landscape becomes a theater for warring aesthetics and cultural icons. Shifting the

anthropological gaze from the colonizer to the colonized, Chagoya's pre-Colombians and futuro-natives (occasionally seen flying around in spaceships) encounter Euro-American modernity and its iconographies as material for harvesting and ingestion. In "The Governor's Nightmare" (1994), for instance, Mickey Mouse is served up on a plate for the "restless natives," while Mondrian, Monet and Picasso get re-cannibalized by Mesoamerican culture in the epic "Modernist Cannibal" (1999).

Indeed, Chagoya's works in this vein go further than merely shifting the terms of some binary (colonizer-colonized), suggesting a kind of violent reappropriation of culture at the level of the body, the tribe, the species. Oswald de Andrade, the great Brazilian modernist poet and critic, called for anthropophagy, or cannibalism, as the method by which the Latin world might ingest the West and its influences, absorbing yet transforming into one's own. In Chagoya's works, the cannibal represents not only the return of the repressed for American imperialism, but also this more intimate — and violent, and embodied — relationship with the pure products of America. From Superman to the Western art canon, Chagoya's cannibals digest and regurgitate (neo)colonial culture, from high to low, and spit back new forms, harkening back to pre-Columbian iconography as well as forward to hybrid visions of the future. Angel Rama's theory of *transculturación* is helpful here, as Chagoya's work argue vigorously for a dialectical transcendence of such cultural clashes, though without ever resorting to an easy rapprochement.

Also featured were three series of satirical drawings, two of them homages to Goya's "Disasters of War," in which Reagan-era political concerns meld into deft re-castings of Goya's originals. More recently, "Poor George" takes Guston's Nixon-era "Poor Richard" drawings and brings them into the present-day political landscape, while also palimpsesting the era of Bush II over the secretive shenanigans of Nixon's reign of error. These satirical works were less exciting than Chagoya's larger projects, if only in that they were less ambitious, and their politics less ambiguous, though the Goya series were exquisitely crafted. The most recent works on display show Chagoya returning to his large-scale "editorials," as with "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" and "Road Map" (both 2004), wherein the machinations of the Bush war machine come under the scrutiny of Chagoya's unwaveringly critical eye. As with the full range of his practice on display here, it remains clear that no form of cultural or political tyranny is safe from Chagoya's re-imaginings of our hybrid pasts, presents, and futures.