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N E W S R E L E A S E

MIT List Visual Arts Center Introduces Work of
Latin Americans Nahum P. Zenil and
Luis Gonzalez Palma



Cambridge, MA, March 1997 -- Two exhibitions by contemporary Latin American artists, *Nahum P. Zenil: Witness to the Self* and *Luis Gonzalez Palma: Photographic Works* will be presented concurrently at the MIT List Visual Arts Center. The exhibitions will open Friday, April 18 with a reception from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. and will remain on view through June 29, 1997.

Nahum P. Zenil: Witness to the Self, comprises 75-80 works that span the whole of Zenil's artistic career. Zenil is well-known in Mexico, and this exhibition offers a U.S. audience the first comprehensive view of his work. Inspired by the realist painting and the 19th century folk *ex-voto* (retablo) tradition of folk painting, the artist paints evocative full-body self-portraits that explore themes of personal and cultural identity in late 20th century Mexican society. Zenil's style of portraiture is also influenced by Jose Guadalupe Posada, a turn-of-the-century social realist, and by Frida Kahlo, who similarly used the self-portrait as a means of exploring her own identity and psychology as well as larger political and gender issues. Zenil takes as his subject relations with his family, particularly his mother, his past as a school teacher, and his ambivalent and contradictory feelings toward his country's Catholicism and his own homosexuality. His works often deal specifically with issues of masculine identity and being gay in Mexico's conservative, patriarchal society.

The exhibition was organized by Edward J. Sullivan, professor and chairman, Department of Fine Arts, New York University, NY, and Clayton C. Kirking, director, Adam and Sophie Gimbel Library, Parsons School of Design, NY. Prior to traveling to the MIT List Visual Arts Center, the exhibition was seen at the Mexican Museum, San Francisco, from March through September 1996 and will travel to New York University's Grey Art Gallery, New York, in September 1997.

Luis Gonzalez Palma, a Guatemalan architect and artist, photographs individual Mayans of his acquaintance not to document the contemporary urban scene, but rather to delve into deeper psychological issues. He poses his subjects with theatrical costumes and symbolic trappings such as angel wings, flowers, crowns, or skulls.

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ZENIL and GONZALEZ PALMA/2

The photographs are toned with sepia and treated with bitumen to create a sense of a faded, faraway time. Gonzalez Palma then often scratches the eyes of his subjects down to the original white paper, setting up an intense contact with the glance of the spectator. The works are often defaced, torn and restitched to imply the presence of violence and an uneasy passage through history.

The artist has said "The situation in Guatemala is, like that of many other countries in the Third World, very critical. But I am not interested only in expressing this marginalized condition but in the consciousness of solitude and a reflection on the fragility and temporary nature of life. The indigenous face has been really a poetic metaphor of this awareness of solitude, not only of a human group but of all mankind. Of course my country causes me pain, just as the human race causes me pain."

The nearly twenty works in the exhibition have been lent by collectors in New York and Chicago.

Public Event

Saturday, April 19, 2 p.m.

"Through the Artists' Eye:

Portrait and Self-Portrait in Latin America Today"

MIT Bartos Theatre (20 Ames St., Lower Level)

free and open to the public

The curators of *Nahum P. Zenil: Witness to the Self*, Edward J. Sullivan and Clayton G. Kirking, will discuss the exhibition in a talk that will begin in the Bartos Theatre (20 Ames St., lower level) with a slide presentation, and progress upstairs to the LVAC galleries, where they will take visitors on a walk through of both the Nahum P. Zenil and Luis Gonzalez Palma exhibitions.

How to Get to the MIT List Visual Arts Center

The List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building, 20 Ames St., at the eastern edge of the MIT campus. It is in close proximity to Kendall Square, Memorial Drive, and the Longfellow Bridge.

By T, take the red line to the Kendall/MIT stop, follow Main St. west to Ames St., turn left, walk the distance of about one block to the cross walk and the List Visual Arts Center, housed in a building identifiable by its white gridded exterior, will be on your left. Signage is on the building.

By car, coming across the Longfellow Bridge or from Memorial Drive, follow signs for Kendall Square. Parking is available at the Cambridge Center parking structure on Ames between Main St. and Broadway during regular hours and on campus after business hours and on weekends.

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ZENIL and GONZALEZ PALMA/2

Gallery Hours

Tues. - Thurs., Sat., Sun. 12 - 6 p.m.
Friday 12 - 8 p.m.
closed Monday

Information

617.253.4680 or
<http://web.mit.edu/lvac/www>

All exhibitions at the List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public.
Wheelchair accessible.

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