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Raul Guerrero's Installations, Photographs, Writings

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Santa Monica

The two installations by Raul Guerrero at the ThomasLewallen Gallery this month are both dated 1973. *Topografia* and *Cristales* reflect the relative timelessness of the artist's production as well as indicating a highly diversified body of work.

Topografia, in the skylit gallery space in back, is a body cast of the artist which is covered with a gray sheet. It floats in the room, ominously funereal. The folds of the sheet describe the shape of the body underneath as lines of longitude and latitude, hence the title. Guerrero has never worked in performance. *Topografia* is a performance work in absence. The document is the real thing. This corpse or sleeping figure theme is contemporary with other "dead man" pieces by Chris Burden and Jack Goldstein five years ago.

The adjacent gallery contains *Cristales*, a motorized kaleidoscope. You peer through a tiny hole at one end of this plexiglass and wire construction to look at slowly revolving gray and blue crystals in an eight-sided mirrorized chamber. The piece is hypnotic, simple and direct. In context with the sleeping figure next door, this becomes the figure's dream — a mechanized vision of elements coalescing and decaying, like a primitive film loop.

On the walls in this gallery is a suite of related photographic works, untitled circle, square and triangle photograms from 1976. To make these cameraless images, Guerrero placed, somewhat randomly, opaque shapes on photographic paper. Like the kaleidoscope object which is distinguished by its directness, the photographic compositions are *essential* photographs.

For the second half of the exhibition, beginning March 21 and ending April 1, the installation pieces will be replaced by new photographs made with a camera obscura. The relative levels of isolation and abstraction of the 1973 works, the weakest aspects of the pieces, are transformed in the new group. Using a public camera obscura on the Santa Monica Palisades overlooking the ocean, Guerrero exposed large sheets of photographic paper to produce negative images of the space surrounding the camera. What we see are Seurat-like perspectives, foliage, paths, cars,



RAUL M GUERRERO: Camera obscura photograph, 1977, at the ThomasLewallen Gallery, Santa Monica.

people sunbathing, playing shuffleboard, jogging in unearthly underworld brown, blue and black.

This group of pictures unifies Guerrero's major aspirations. First, the pictures are accessible; they depict everyday objects and situations. Second, like the photograms, they reinvent photography. Third, randomness and abstraction are important compositional elements. Unlike *Topografia* and *Cristales*, these functions are not in the service of minimalism, but operate within a

social framework. Fourth, the works express a visionary feeling which the best of Guerrero's objects and photographs tap into.

On March 25 the gallery will present four videotapes by Guerrero: *Nude*, *Vuelo Mundial*, *Circle Square Triangle* and an untitled work. Finally, a selection of the artist's writings will be published in context with the exhibition. I saw parts of the publication in progress, and the writing, short works of fiction, is very good, possibly the best work in the show. □