

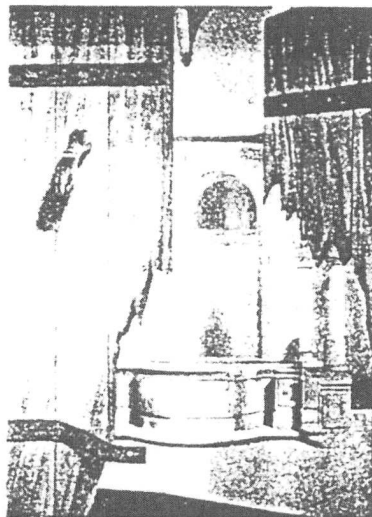
## LOS ANGELES

### Raul Guerrero at Kuhlenschmidt

The images in Raul Guerrero's recent oil paintings (all 1985) are highly realistic renderings of unreal scenes and events. Taken one way, they are like mystical visions: windows on a world which defies natural laws. Yet they cast an ironic eye on the view from these windows, since there is a large element of visual cliché in Guerrero's work. *The Pool of Palenque* evokes the sensibility of Disney's *Fantasia* even as it manifests a yearning for genuine religiosity. Surrounded by brightly colored butterflies, a fourth-century Mayan mask floats in mid-air while a frog noncommittally observes its defiance of gravity. In *Undiscovered Chamber*, the three small Zapotec figurines gathered around a bowl look more like living, breathing gnomes than stone relics.

Guerrero is best known for the conceptually oriented work he created in Los Angeles during the mid to late '70s. In these recent paintings he returned to the concerns of a 1979 installation for the gallery of the Claremont Graduate School, in which he recreated, among other things, the bird whistles made by early California Native Americans. The whistles were hooked up to play continuously, and a Yaqui Devil Mask, often used by Native Americans in performed rituals, was made to revolve continuously in a circular fashion.

Raul Guerrero: *Vista de Bonampak*, 1985, oil on canvas, 4 by 5 feet, at Kuhlenschmidt.



The recent work exudes a similar fascination with aboriginal culture of the Americas, but shifts from a Conceptualist to a quasi-Surrealist approach. Yet even though Guerrero uses an illustrative mode of picture-making indebted to Dali and Magritte, he remains true to his Conceptualist origins. *Desire* pictures a warehouse of objects from various epochs in art history. In the foreground, a Gauguinesque nude has her back to the viewer and the Venus de Milo looks our way; in the background, innumerable sculptures, many of them fragments of nudes, are piled up like so much detritus. The painting is less about personal desire than the forms in which art has represented desire.

Guerrero's paintings owe less to Surrealist sources than to conventional Hollywood clichés of the Surrealist style. The image of the levitating Mayan mask in *The Pool of Palenque* reads like a bit of cinematic hocus-pocus rather than a genuine synthesis of dream and reality. *The Last Dream* is an reality.

equally theatrical. It depicts partially destroyed wooden gates, adorned with a knocker in the shape of a human hand, through which we glimpse an unpopulated Mexican courtyard bathed in lavender light.

But Guerrero's emphasis on Surreal scenes, however self-consciously conventional they may be, hints at his desire to transcend cliché—his desire to find a pictorial vocabulary which takes account of the subconscious. The current work suggests that at some point Guerrero may be able to cast aside an iconography of kitsch-infused Surrealism in favor of a more directly visionary mode of painting. —Robert L. Pincus