

**RAUL GUERRERO**

**A native of Southern California, Raul Guerrero lives and works in San Diego. He studied art at the Chouinard Art Institute, from which he received a B.F.A. in 1969.**

In the late 1800s, my grandfather, a Tarahumara native from northern Mexico, walked across the then barrierless border into southern Texas. In another part of the world, Tahiti, Gauguin—romping, carousing and leading the life of a European artist in exile by choice—painted his masterpieces.

When Tenochtitlán, present day Mexico City, was conquered by Cortez and his army, they found a city of two million people, with a highly developed culture which was in many ways superior to that of the conquerors. The city was composed of broad avenues, flowers were everywhere and the markets sold goods from every part of the Aztec domain and beyond. There were libraries, and the arts and crafts flourished.

The conquerors of this new land quickly established a model of comportment that was emulated by subsequent rulers and political parties—exploit, pillage, rape and keep the masses undereducated and impoverished. The brunt of this governing style was the unfortunate *indio* who, to this date, is still disenfranchised much as Native Americans in the United States, i.e. they have very little political, cultural, societal expression except in prescribed areas.

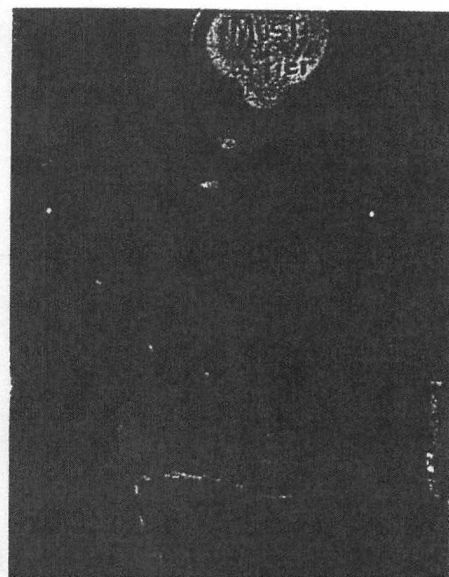
By moving to the United States, my grandfather inadvertently created the

opportunity of choice for those of us now here in this country. A choice that might not have been possible in Mexico where currently the average wage of a school teacher is 50 dollars per week, the minimum wage is four dollars per day, not per hour. A tube of paint is two dollars, a chicken four. In the United States the wealth and the vast middle class have made it possible to select a lifestyle based on choice rather than necessity, just like Gauguin. One of the problems, of course, is that in most cases new immigrants don't understand that a creative choice or any choice is even possible. Such is the consequence of that strong negative conditioning of these immigrants in their respective countries, especially those arriving from the Pacific Rim.

Eventually these new immigrants will find themselves in the position of being able to choose for themselves what they would like to do with their lives. If they become artists, I wonder what they will express. I'm especially curious about the possibility of seeing a full-blooded Zapotec, Mixtec or a Huichol (people who have such incredible heritages) express themselves from the point of view of personal rather than economic necessity. The problem with this scenario, of course, is that we are still living in a Eurocentric art scene, which might in its own way perpetuate the circumstances outlined here. But from a collective sense of think-

ing, it might be said that we have yet to see what thought, feelings and ways of viewing reality the native Mexican Indian has within him-or-herself.

For myself, educated biculturally—American/Mexican—and to compound that, born and reared in Southern California (with all that connotes), I realize the uniqueness of my situation as well as for others like me. Artistically, my interests do not stray very far from those of many of my contemporaries, as my education was at the Chouinard Art Institute, supplemented by trips abroad and living in Mexico. I'm interested in the phenomena of culture and what it means to be living in the twentieth century, how one feels about a world that is rapidly diminishing, that is becoming increasingly complex. Last year I worked on a series of oil paintings titled *Reflections on the Life and Times of a Venetian Jewess*, a somewhat fictional narrative of paintings presented salon-style. For the last year I've focused my attention on the night life of the Tijuana working class in a series titled *Aspectos de la Vida Nocturna en Tijuana B.C.* Next year I plan to work on a set of paintings focusing on the mid-Western state of Iowa.



Raul Guerrero, *Aspectos de la Vida Nocturna en Tijuana B.C., Molino Rojo, 1981*. Oil on linen, 56 x 48 inches. Courtesy: Saxon-Lee Gallery, Los Angeles