

Guerrero goes solo in career overview

It's beginning to look like a trend. For the second consecutive summer, the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego is presenting a solo exhibition for a San Diego artist.

In 1997, Jay Johnson was the featured artist. This year, in a show opening on Sunday at its downtown facility, the museum is highlighting the career of Raúl M. Guerrero, one of the city's most consistently engaging painters and object makers since 1980, when he moved here from Los Angeles.

The exhibition is "Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies" — its name drawn from a 1591 text by Spanish explorer Juan de Cardenas. (The history of the Americas is one of Guerrero's perennial subjects.) Toby Kamps, assistant curator for the museum, has been responsible for giving shape to the show.

This is the curatorial debut for Kamps, who joined the museum's staff earlier this year. And he feels his collaboration with the artist, in the creation of this show, has provided him with a deep appreciation for Guerrero's achievements.

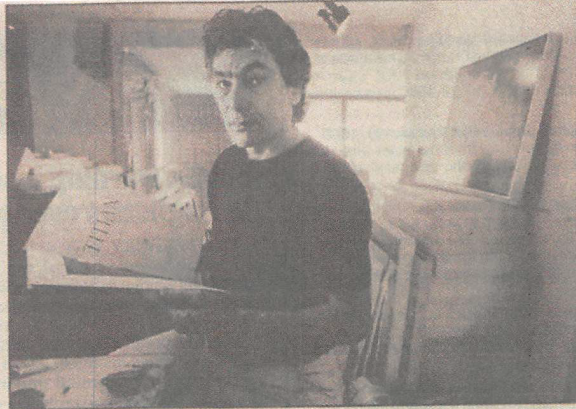
"At the heart of the work is a search for the poetry of life," says Kamps. "I think we have to understand that Guerrero is a romantic at heart, even if he began his career in L.A. with conceptually based objects.

"Guerrero ranges out into the world, looking for the beautiful, for the dramatic and the tragic. He commemorates them in his art and pays homage to them. Not many contemporary artists are able to do that. He is an anthropologist and a poet at the same time, who is able to combine observation and subjective comment.

"He is also a courageous artist who doesn't stick to one thing but is constantly reinventing his style. He is a restless experimenter."

Like any show involving a curator and a living artist, this one "was a negotiation."

Kamps is happy in the extreme



FILE PHOTO

Raúl M. Guerrero: Subject of a solo show at the Museum of Contemporary Art's downtown space.



with the outcome and believes viewers will be too.

"I feel this show is going to knock people's socks off. It will convey the amazing draftsmanship, the amazing range of his work."

The exhibition chronicles Guerrero's entire career, beginning in the early '70s. Kamps has borrowed work from a wide range of collections in Southern California and among those who loaned work are Oliver Stone, who owns several works by the artist, and prominent L.A. artist Ed Ruscha, whose enthusiasm for his art stretches back to Guerrero's days as an emerging figure.

The exhibition, which fills the museum's second-floor galleries, continues through Oct. 25. The downtown quarters are at 1001 Kettner Blvd. at Broadway.

Guerrero, too

One of the venerable ways of bringing viewers into a gallery is to feature the same artist who is exhibiting at a museum. The Porter Troupe Gallery in Hillcrest (301 Spruce St.) is doing just that: Its current show is "The Great Plains: 1830-1880s," which presents paintings, drawings and sculptures by Guerrero.

The works at Porter Troupe fix on the Western frontier and the meeting of European and American Indian cultures during the 19th century. Take note, however. This show is on view for a briefer period than the artist's museum survey; it ends Sept. 5.

Guerrero also is in a group show curated by William Leavitt, a longtime Los Angeles artist. "Chairs, Plazas, Faces, Gardens, Rooms" features five California artists and is at the Rosamund Felsen Gallery in Santa Monica's Bergamot Station complex (2525 Michigan Ave.). This exhibition ends Aug. 1. Phone: (310) 828-8488.