

Curator: **Allen Ruppertsberg**

When I decided to nominate Raul Guerrero for a slot on CUE Art Foundation's exhibition program, I suggested showing his series of paintings begun in 1984 in Oaxaca, Mexico, because I had never quite forgotten them. They were his first foray into painting and have remained unique—at least to me—throughout his subsequent career, which has mostly focused on painting, and in particular, painting a sense of place. This series had never, to my knowledge been shown together, but had been painted as a group and in a consistent and original style. That style might be defined as primitive but not naïve, with a touch of magic realism from the time and incorporating a narrative feeling of space coming from his sculptural tableaux of the past. The elements that made the sculptural environments stand out had passed into the paintings.

His current work has grown into something more sophisticated or knowledgeable most would say, myself included, but I am also still thoroughly attracted to those first efforts. I selfishly wanted to see them all together at least one time.

I first met Raul at the Chouinard Art Institute where we were both students in the mid 1960's. It was a decade later, however, when we coincidentally found ourselves living in the same apartment building in Santa Monica, that we became close friends and that I began to know more completely his work and ideas.

Raul's art at the time was a formally mixed approach of the interdisciplinary kind characteristic of this period. Centering primarily on sculpture, it included film, video, photography, found and appropriated objects often placed in a kind of tableau, drawing, and prints. There was a specific, conceptualized slant to these combinations that was familiar to me, beginning with a sort of Duchampian Dada and incorporating strains of Surrealism, outré (at the time) painters like Raul Dufy, kitsch illustration, and the general detritus of Spanish and American cultural history that he found growing up in the San Diego area of Southern California. Then in 1984, as he has told me, he tired of trying to infuse these by then mostly straight ahead sculptural projects with the emotional world he was living in. He decided to try to render this world in paint rather than objects and chose as his first subject the Mexican city of Oaxaca. This was to initiate an interest in painting cities and a certain range of subjects that continue to occupy him to this day. I think of this early effort in Oaxaca as the touchstone of what was to come later and what was to embody, for him, some of the best thoughts in a new/old medium.