

CROSSOVERS

VISUAL ART

Mapmaker, Mapmaker, Rend Me a Map

by Robert Enright

It will come as no surprise to anyone that *Cartographies* gets you thinking about maps, about how they're drawn and what they're drawn from. This large, touring exhibition, chosen by Brazilian curator Ivo Mesquita for the Winnipeg Art Gallery, is an especially revealing map of contemporary art-making in Latin America. It includes 14 artists from half as many countries who, taken together, project a different vision of art from the "Other Americas" than we thought we knew, if we thought about it at all. In its range and quality, *Cartographies* is shockingly good.

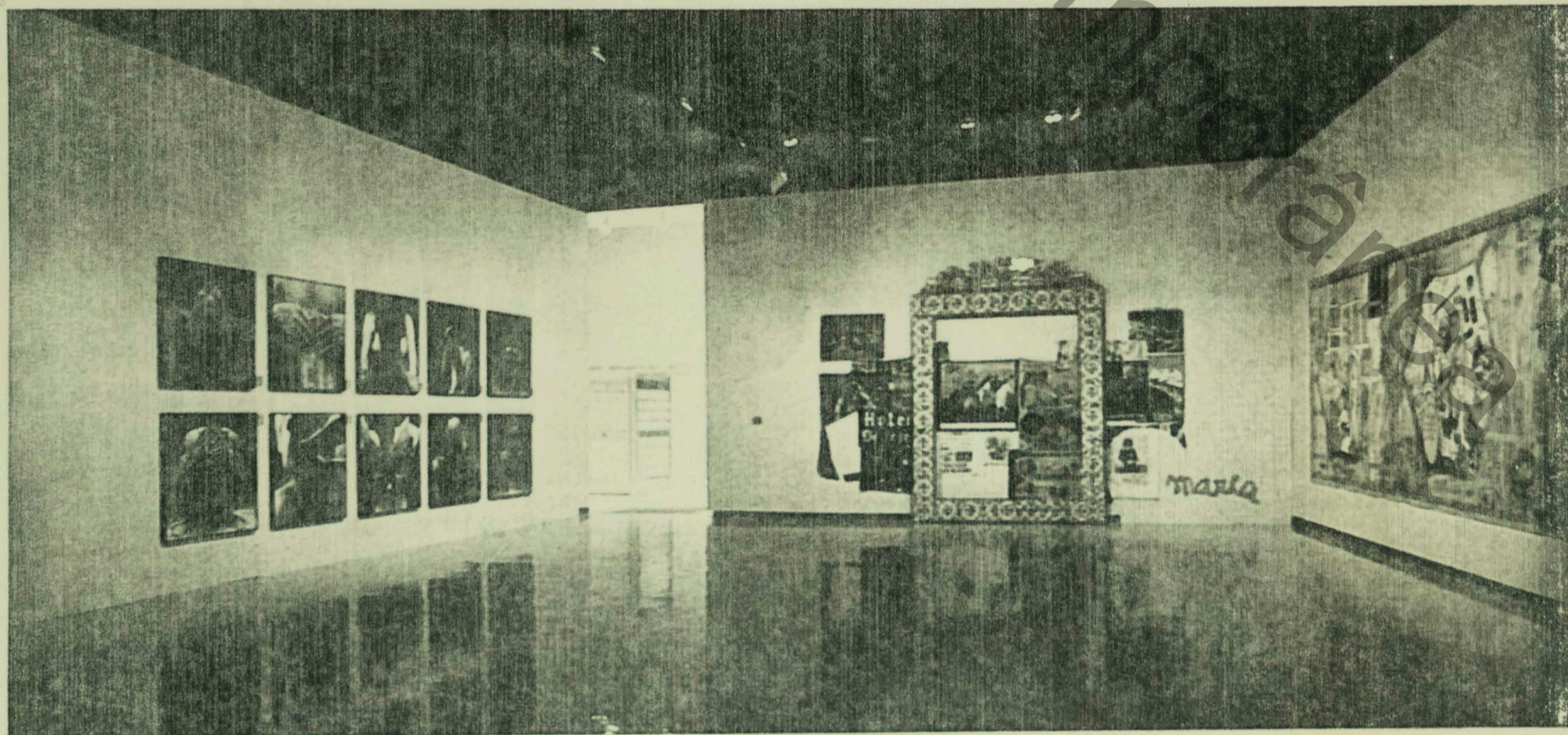
I should say straight off that this recognition is a measure of my own lack of awareness and not evidence of some miraculous change in the quantity and quality of Latin American art. It's clear in looking at the work and reading a myriad of catalogues and articles written about

the artists in the show that there is a tradition of art practice in the seven countries represented that goes back well before 1980, which is the date of the earliest work chosen by Mr. Mesquita. It is also clearly work that has its two feet firmly planted in the unfirm ground of the post-modern, post-colonial garden. The map *Cartographies* gives us is, intentionally and intelligently, all over the place.

In one important sense, Mesquita's map is a corrective, a re-drawing of lines. It aims to dislodge a set of attitudes about Latin America that envisions it as exotic and primitive on one hand, and as economically rapacious and ideologically militant on the other. A dog-eat-map sort of place. Mesquita's perspective is both more formal and more personal than that quip suggests. What strikes me about the choices he has made is how affectionate they are, how much they reflect a careful art of gesture and sensibility. I don't mean gesture in the painterly sense—although there is a wealth of evidence supporting a high level of aesthetic achievement—but gesture as a trace of human consciousness, as a track, as marks made on a map. The viewer is continually reminded in walking through the show that maps have a

provisional dimension; they are both a definition of where we have been and a speculation about where we might be going. The essential strength of the show rests in that contingent exploration.

It's worth noting that there really are maps in *Cartographies* (not just chartings of imaginative possibility) and they underline the drawbacks of the cartographer's art viewed as a journey of progressive hesitations. Guillermo Kuitca from Argentina paints maps of cities and regions—Zurich, Hamburg, North Dakota—which rest ambiguously on the cusp between accuracy and fantasy. One of his maps (it seems to be somewhere in Australia) shows roadways, bodies of water and parks outlined with thorns, which make you realize that cartography can be an activity which locates you less in the captain's quarters than in the briar patch. There are times when the emphasis on the degree of personal exploration Mr. Mesquita admires borders on the explosive; the art of Nahum Zenil from Mexico pushes ego to the edge of narcissism. Zenil's obsession with himself and his look-alike male lover is singularly uncontaminated; he draws himself as avenging angel, as St. Sebastian, as either Jacob or



"Cartographies," Winnipeg Art Gallery, installation, left to right: Mario Cravo Neto, Alfred Wenemoser, Juan Davila. Photographs: Ernest Mayer