

SPRING 1993

\$5.00

# BORDER CROSSINGS

A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

Western Magazine Award  
MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR  
Five Time Winner

GATHIE  
FALK

JOHN  
CORIGLIANO

ERIN MOURÉ

AL MCWILLIAMS MICHAEL KENYON

MICHAEL OLITO GUY MADDIN





# 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

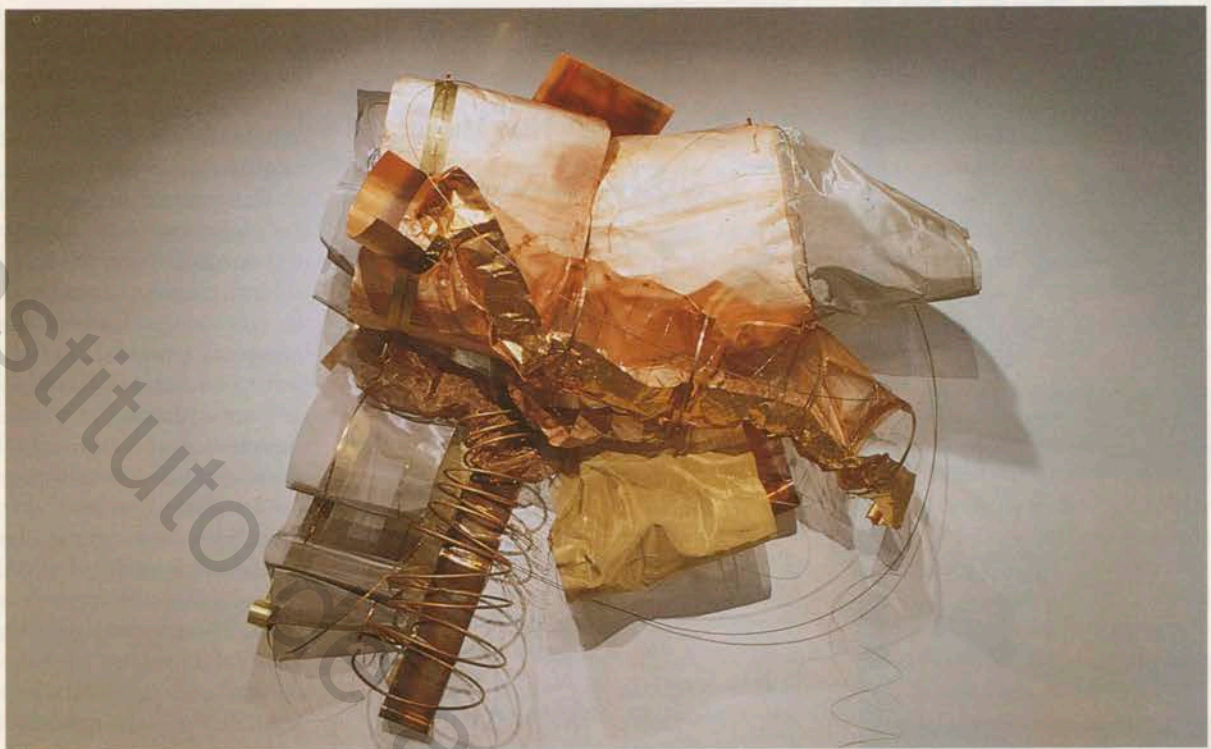
provisional dimension; they are both a definition of where we have been and a speculation about where we might be going. The essential strength of the show rests in that contingent exploration.

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.





Iole de Freitas, *Untitled*, 1993, metals, 320 x 350 x 90 cm.

the angel (their wrestle is more amorous than any of the four evangelists ever dreamt), and even as a crowd, a whole nation sprung from his image, a kind of *crotch populi*. What makes Zenil's art even more intriguing is how much it owes to the Mexican folk art tradition; it elaborates a special sort of willed naïveté. The equally self-delighting paintings of another Mexican artist, Julio Galán, use elements of folk art as well, but the mix here is with pop culture; he is inspired more by media than by melancholy, more by systematizing than sentimentalizing. But what he shares with Zenil is a compulsion towards the art of autobiography; map-making is self-making for these two Mexicans; the cartographer is a mythographer.

Brazilian José Leonilson is no less concerned with autobiography, but the variously flirtatious and cautionary aphorisms sewn onto fragments of material which he then tacks onto the gallery walls are heart-breaking in their fragility. (The stitching on the cloth looks like awkward wounds, as if a bumpkin scar came in from the country.)

There is a similar extension of the material of art in the work of a Brazilian painter-turned-sculptor named Carlos

Fajardo. One untitled piece is made from only two elements; a bolt of pink chiffon arranged on a 610-kilogram slab of Manitoba tyndal stone. The cloth teases the delicacy out of the stone, so much so that the entire piece appears about to take off, the agent of some kind of assumption into aesthetic heaven. Fajardo has also fabricated a green glycerin sphere that resembles a massive bocce ball. As with all his work in this exhibition, you feel the urge to rub and touch and polish it. These are objects with a tactile lure. Fajardo shares with British sculptor Tony Cragg an ability to effect almost magical transformations in the materials he uses. Cragg turns up quite often in *Cartographies*; along with Brancusi he seems to have touched the work of the Colombian sculptor, Germán Botero. Botero's vaguely realistic hats and musical instruments are at once curious and elegant, and the way the eye traverses the alternately rough and smooth surfaces of these floor sculptures seems a particularly Craggy apprehension. Juan Davila, a Chilean artist living in Australia, also has uses for the British sculptor who lives in Wuppertal, Germany. Davila's huge paintings are an elliptical anthology of art and social history in which artists as different

as Cragg, Robert Indiana, Gilbert and George, Miro, General Idea, Sol Lewitt, Frieda Kahlo and (in the wounded canvases?) maybe even Lucio Fontana turn up. They are part of a carnival of ideas, attitudes and artists that are not so much recorded in Davila's work as placed in a common arena where they compete with one another for the viewer's attention. These paintings may acknowledge the scale of the art of Rivera and Siqueiros but they have nothing of the singleness of purpose at the centre of Social Realist art. Davila's production operates outside that kind of singularity and insists upon a recognition of irony, multivalency and something I want to call concerned distance. Cragg may be one aesthetic guide in the quotational map being drawn by Latin American artists but so, it seems, is the master-bewilderer, Bertolt Brecht. Repeatedly, as viewers, we're reminded of the acute awareness of the artists in *Cartographies*. The photographs of Salvadoreans by Mario Cravo Neto appear, at first glance, to come from the same dubious anthropology as does Irving Penn, or from the eroticized gaze of Robert Mapplethorpe. But Neto lives among his subjects and his motivation in photographing them is