

# ARTS SPACE

## The little exhibit that could

*Contemporary art visible at the San Antonio Museum of Art*

By JOHN EWING

**W**hen Aida Zorrilla accepted a minority internship last June with the San Antonio Museum of Art, who could have predicted that six weeks later her boss would quit and leave the TCU graduate holding the bag?

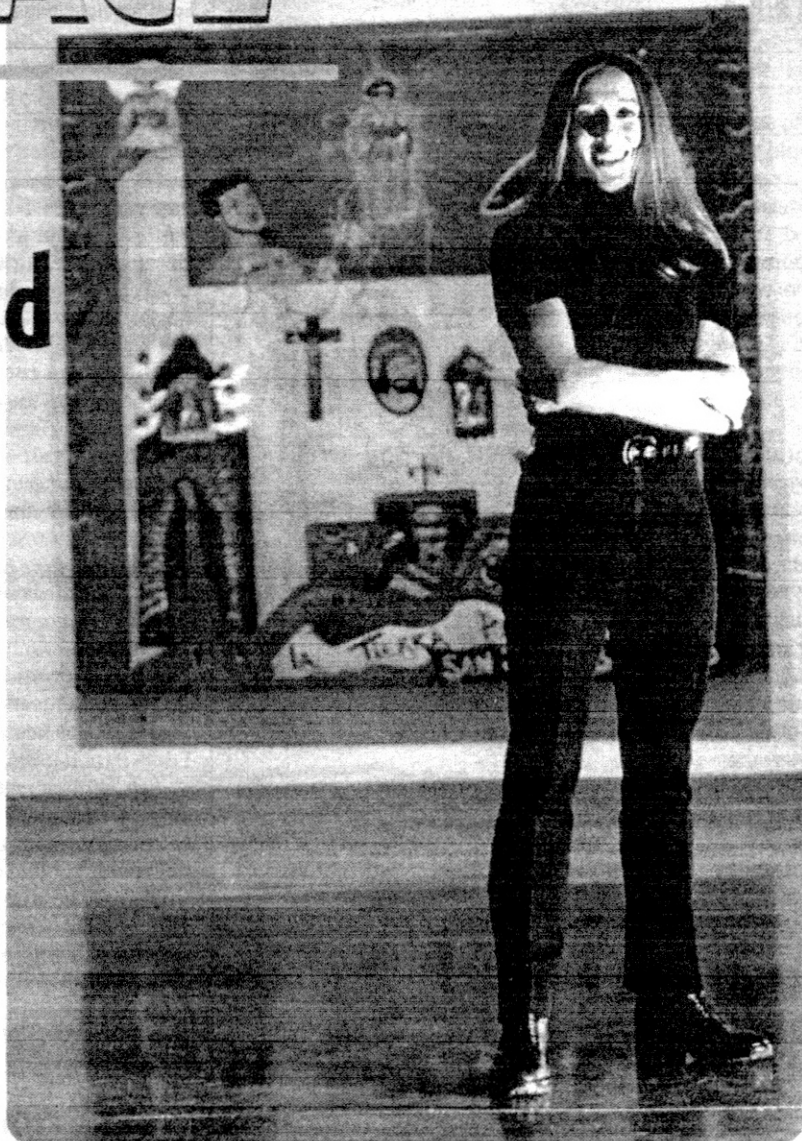
Beverly Adams' hasty departure as SAMoA's Curator of Contemporary Art sounded a death knell for the struggling department. At this critical moment in the Museum's history, when it is without a permanent director and completing what will be the institution's defining glory (The Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art), several curatorial positions stand vacant and galleries have closed, all to channel resources into the new Center.

An austerity measure herself, Zorrilla was given the title of Assistant Curator and asked to shoulder two momentous projects: the installation of the Modern and Contemporary Gallery for the Latin

American Art Center, and a securely funded community arts series titled "Sense of Sight." Bucking conventional wisdom, the San Antonio native focused on the latter, plunging into the contentious waters that have isolated the institution from local arts practitioners for years.

"The one thing Beverly kept telling me was 'the community is ready for something like this at the Museum and will be there to support you,'" recalls Zorrilla. Indeed, Sense of Sight galvanized San Antonio's extraordinary human resources and creativity, evolving into a lively series of informal encounters between artists, leaders of institutions, and citizens.

But during the nine-month series, there was virtually no contemporary art hanging in the Museum, despite the ample collec-



*Aida Zorrilla fronting work by David Zamora Casas.*

## RE:VIEW

### **Collective Visions**

**WHERE:** Cowden Gallery,  
San Antonio Museum of Art,  
300 West Jones

**WHEN:** through March 1999  
**INFO:** 978-8100

tion in SAMoA storage. Astounded by its size and breadth, Zorrilla was eager to sustain the momentum of Sense of Sight and to produce an exhibit that would not only keep the community engaged but also tide the Museum over until the opening of the Latin American Center in October. "Like books in a

library, an art collection is a public record," says Zorrilla. "I don't think it's right to have works in a collection if there's no intention to exhibit them."

A true collaboration between SAMoA and the community, the concept for the Collective Visions **See Collective Visions, next page**

exhibit was simple, and simply radical. Zorrilla would pick eight works by local artists from the contemporary collection. Those artists would in turn pick eight other works from the collection, as well as a second local artist who had never exhibited at the Museum. The result would be eight groupings of three, whose relatedness would be as unpredictable as the creative act itself. But then she hit an institutional wall.

"The Museum's main concern was that we had too much on our plate," says Zorrilla. "They were afraid to make additional commitments. I might have agreed, but Collective Visions would happen during Contemporary Art Month, and there was absolutely no way that we would step out of the game and undo all the good that Sense of Sight accomplished." As fine as that sounds, SAMoA's hierarchy was reluctant to support the exhibit. Zorrilla was warned by members of SAMoA's Board of Trustees that she had no idea what she was getting herself into; feelings would be hurt among the San Antonio artists who were not asked to participate.

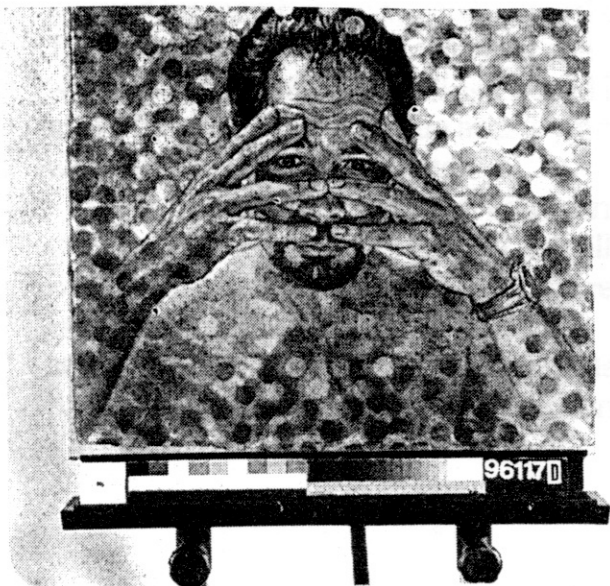
More to the point, Museum funds and staff were already heavily tapped. Zorrilla would not have the full support of the registrar's office (the caretakers who store and document the art) or the exhibits department (the entity responsible for hang-

ing the work). Thus began the real collaboration. Zorrilla, SAMoA Board Chair Sarah Harte, and architect Henry Muñoz collectively "beat the bushes." The exhibit's novel concept encouraged donations from locals who had given up on the idea of seeing contemporary art at SAMoA. When Zorrilla approached Rosemary Kowalski, the local business owner exclaimed, "There are eight works in the collection by local artists? I didn't know that!"

With funding arranged in a matter of weeks, Zorrilla assembled her team. An exhibits professional was hired from outside the Museum. Rachel Mauldin, SAMoA's registrar, volunteered to help, and Shaka McGlotten, the new summer intern, appeared as if by magic. Together, the team worked morning to night to install the show in four days.

The evening before the opening, SAMoA's interim director Gerry Scott gathered the Museum staff in the Latin American Art Center under construction to fan flagging spirits. Scott reminded everyone that in October the Museum would be giving an incredible gift to the community.

"I started thinking about how Collective Visions related to that," says Zorrilla. "Artists are the obvious liaisons between the art world and what's happening in a museum. A museum can't stand alone without its community, and the artists need and very much want the support of a museum. It's a two-way street." ■



"Circulos de Confusion," by Angel Rodriguez-Diaz, is on exhibit as part of the Collective Visions show at the San Antonio Museum of Art.