

Reflections in an artist's eye

Contemporary Art Month goes deep

BY JOHN EWING

Like a mid-summer margarita, Contemporary Art Month comes just in time to distract San Antonians from the mounting heat, but it's not just frosty drinks that lure crowds into the steamy streets of Southtown and surrounding neighborhoods during July. The call of new art is a distraction of a higher order, detaching us from everyday life only to return us with an altered, and perhaps expanded, view of the world. This year, CAM offers numerous opportunities to reflect broadly on nature, society, and the complex expressions of personal identity.

Celebrating its 15th anniversary, Blue Star Art Space kicks off First Friday, July 7, with a quinceañera group show entitled *Rites of Passage*. Organized by artist/curator Alejandro Diaz, the exhibition challenges the participating artists to explore their own personal milestones or examples of larger, cultural transitions. Joining local luminaries Phillip Avila, Anne Wallace, Shady Lady, and others, are internationally known Carolee Schneemann, Tracey Moffatt, and Coco Fusco. By combining San Antonio and New York artists in the show, Diaz, a San Antonio native, is creatively tapping his own life-changing move to New York City, where his work is currently showing at El Museo del Barrio.

"A rite of passage is about hitting a

spot in yourself that's difficult, but once you do, it opens doors mentally and creatively," comments Diaz, who considers curating a balance of ideas as well as works of art. "It's a lot of visualizing, seeing the exhibit before I actually see it and making sure it's cohesive conceptually," says Diaz.

At the other end of the Blue Star complex, Say Sí and the Project Room will keep the First Friday mood reflective. *Propaganda — The Politics of Art/The Art of Politics* is the overarching title for five installations by Say Sí's student artists, including a multi-media projection in the organization's new media arts studio. Collaborating with visiting artists Dwayne Bohuslav, Suzanne Paquette, Regis Shepperd, Noel Merrium, and Denise Cassanova, the students are engaging a variety of social and artistic topics, from "proliferation of guns" to poetry in collage. On the backside of Building B, The Project Room will screen "Hairdo," a documentary short by New Orleans filmmaker Genevieve Leyh. With quick edits and a lively soundtrack, the film visits a close-knit group of African-American women, their unique hair fashions, and a legacy of creativity in an inner-city neighborhood.

Other artists are contemplating traditional objects, historic settings, and outmoded stereotypes at diverse venues around the city. At the Southwest School of Art and Craft, *Like a Painting/Like a Book: Innovative Paper* is a bold and timely exhibit by six artists from across the country and Mexico City. With delicately shaped paper and branches, Melissa Jay Craig of



(L to R) Alejandro Diaz, curator of Blue Star's Rites of Passage show, with Tracey Moffatt and Carolee Schneemann, artists in the show.

PHOTO BY JOHN EWING

Chicago likens books to bursting seed-pods or dead leaves, portentous omens contained in beautiful objects. Later in July, Jesse Amado will present a video installation in the lobby of the Alameda Theater, revisiting the old movies and childhood memories that personalize the landmark site. Opening June 30 at Sala Diaz, Henry Rayburn takes on the gallery's closet, investigating facets of

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containment with bright fabrics and works in progress, while Leon Bridges' fashion illustrations remind viewers of the seductive power of the hand-drawn line.

Painters and sculptors reflect on nature, the body and the abstract spaces in between in many shows throughout July. At the San Antonio Art League, painters Julie Verschoyle and K. Barneby depict Texas landscapes, cityscapes and wildlife from different perspectives, while sculptor Martha Williams creates "bio-morphic forms" with silk and copper. Finesilver Gallery features Irene Hardwicke Olivieri's paintings of humans and animals in storied communion, and a

Hills Snyder installation that turns a room into a punning, visual game. Mel Casas reintroduces the female nude with paintings at Joan Grona Gallery, and Juan Farias celebrates abstraction with First Friday musicians, poets and revelers at Gallista Gallery. Though by no means complete, the above list and descriptions should whet an appetite to sample the city's expanding palette. Over 15 years, Contemporary Art Month has evolved from a small event into a community-wide, free-form festival spotlighting working artists of all stripes; there's no better season to get distracted by art in San Antonio. ■

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