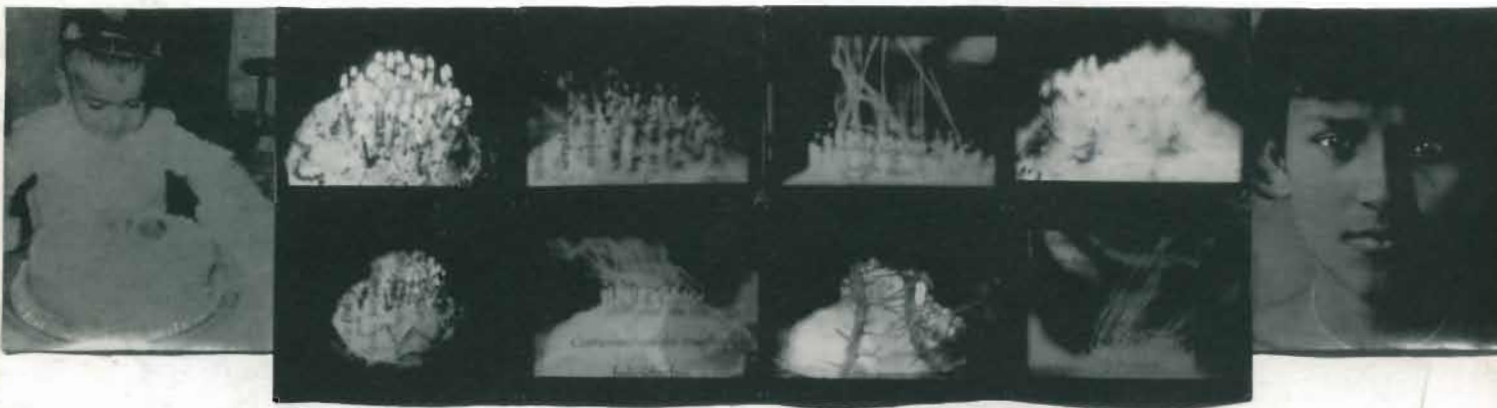


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FROM SHINING TO DARK TIMES...
 LUIS GONZALEZ PALMA'S
EL CIRCO-ENVENENADO DE ESTRELLAS

Luis Gonzalez Palma shows us clearly what is most difficult to see: intense interior states which are unbearably poignant. He makes portraits, but he is not concerned with physical likeness. Rather, he searches for what lies beneath the surface: psychological portraits which consistently focus on what he has called "the consciousness of our solitude." Consistently Palma photographs members of the Mayan culture, whom he describes as gentle and mystical, and who have undergone their own loss of cultural identity, to illustrate this universal human condition.

The models in his works are his close friends, his neighbors, even his own goddaughter. Yet despite his personal attachments to them, the finished photographs show us iconic and monumental characters. Theatre and performance is at the heart of his works. He supplies the costumes and the props for each model. Often he will tell the model a story as he photographs his or her reactions. These external elements and conditions address themes which are characteristic of drama: conflict between innocence and experience, beauty and evil, passion and loss.

The imagery in the latest body of work entitled *El Circo: Envenenado de Estrellas* (*The Circus: Poisoned by the Stars*), exhibited until November 11th, is based on three poems. Two are written by close friends from Mexico and the other is anonymous, found on the wall in a cantina bathroom. The title of the exhibition comes from a poem written by Maria Santiago which makes the circus a metaphor for one's life; the implication being that our lives fluctuate from shining to dark times, depending upon where the spotlight falls. As in his earlier works, his models take on roles: the magician stares intently from under his jeweled turban, a harlequin fancies himself a dragonfly wearing oversized translucent wings, and a young child's face is painted to mimic a clown's. The poet writes "one eats the moon like cheese and is poisoned by the stars." Thus, Palma shows us life's very real cycles of joy and despair, played out in the context of a riotous, fantastic performance.

Another poem, by Francisco Najera, lends its title to Luis Gonzalez Palma's *Acariciando la Muerte* (*Caressing Death*). The festive and decorative element of a birthday cake belies the theme of the work: that we live conscious of our own diminishing, that we are literally and figuratively dying from the day of our birth.

A frank acceptance of death is just one of several nineteenth-century influences apparent in this most recent body of work. Palma is cited as admiring the spirituality of Julia Margaret Cameron, perhaps the best known of the turn-of-the-century English portraitists whose work had a keen Pre-Raphaelite sensibility. Cameron, too, was concerned with recording the inner features of her sitters, and hoped that even the simplest of portraits became, in her words, "almost the



A CONVERSATION WITH FRED STONEHOUSE

September 1, 1995

In a recent interview with painter Fred Stonehouse, writer Kathleen Vanesian found this accomplished artist as iconoclastic, quirky and intriguing as his paintings:

KV: How does your newest work differ, if at all, from your previous work?

FS: Nothing really has changed conceptually with my work. I've basically been dealing with the same kind of baggage my whole life. Stylistically, however, the work has changed in terms of how I get conceptual material into a visual form. It's actually a blend of what I had achieved in the past five or six years.

I've been leading up to this point, stylistically—going from the cartoony and flat, with lots of bright colors. Early on, the paintings looked more like "retablos meet the funnies." The work gradually became more illusionistic, then naturalistic, and finally very pastoral; the background landscapes were becoming more developed and the figures were almost mythological, romantic characters. After constant experimentation and a bit of bouncing around, which I had to go through to discover the range of stylistic possibilities available to me, I'm going back to deriving more of the work's look from retablos and ex-votos.

KV: Is there any common thematic thread running through this latest body of work or are you exploring several different issues?

FS: There is a common thread: self-portraiture. The paintings always have been semi-self-portraits; now they are specifically self-portraits, even though sometimes they have donkey heads. It's been a conscious decision in the past year to look at them as self-portraiture. In the past, I did cartoony versions of myself. Initially, I thought I had been inventing faces. One day, I realized I was really using my own head as a model and altering it to suit my mood. With this whole last body of work, because it's reflective of my own progression, I decided it makes perfect sense, at least for now, to just make them all self-portraits. People had been saying they were for years—so, why not go ahead and let these be self-portraits?

I think the characters in the work have always been the same; they always had the same sense of existential sadness and humor about them, but the settings kept changing. And people were starting to say, "Boy, I really like your work. But the figures are very disturbing"—as if the landscape was what it was about, and not the figure. And, really, the figure and the content that went along with the figure—and the situations these characters were in—were more interesting to me. The landscape was really just background. I loved playing around with that, but people were missing the point in the work.

I started working on this new group of things and, at some juncture, the doors started opening up. Suddenly, I decided that I don't have to follow these rules I've been setting up for myself, that they don't mean anything—that I can break them any time I want. That's what happened. I started mixing things that I wouldn't have in the past—that's what's going on right now. There's this kind of free drawing into my bag of tricks and grabbing all sorts of stuff from the past ten years. And it's working great, I think. I've pared down and clarified the vision in the work.

KV: So you're still dealing with those same themes of isolation, alienation and mortality that seem to drift in and out of your work?

FS: That's definitely still there. The work still deals with that old cliché of modernism, especially in literature, about man's existential plight. And it's very much self-reflective of the sad position we're in. It's about our lonely, pathetic place in the world, although my world view is leavened with humor. The work laughs at it all, but you're laughing to keep from crying. That's what it's all about. I think that's just the way I look at the world.

However, I'm mucking around more in my own baggage at the present. It's very autobiographical work now...drawing on stories from my childhood, dreams from my childhood, real and imagined narratives, things from my past.

KV: You use a lot of visual mixed metaphors, images that are unsettling, heretical, almost blasphemous because they don't go along with standard religious iconography.

FS: I break the rules of symbolism intentionally. There are certain things I've been very influenced by in my life, but if I were to sit down and paint a Catholic painting, there's not much point to that. I'm this sort of lapsed Catholic; even if you're not a practicing Catholic, it's in your blood—you're a Catholic for life. It's like being a recovering alcoholic.

What I love about Catholicism, I like to use; I kind of break the other rules because they annoy me. I can do it anyway I want and I don't have any qualms about it. I can't imagine that it really bothers anybody. That's what creates the tension in the paintings. Someone once said they're half prayer and half joke.

KV: How did someone from Wisconsin, which I associate with Irish or German Catholicism, become so enamored of Mexico and its very different brand of Catholicism?

FS: There's a huge Sicilian population here; my mother was pure Sicilian and hers was the family I grew up in. Sicilians are extremely superstitious people who believe in the supernatural and they kind of combine it all...Sicilian-style Roman Catholicism is really very close to Mexican Catholicism.

As a kid, I was very used to being in a house full of religious imagery, with a Martyr-of-the-Month calendar hanging on the wall. The stigmata was also a very big deal then. I was an altar boy, went to Catholic school, and grew up with in a somewhat eccentric family atmosphere. My grandma and grandpa, my aunts and uncles would all go to Mass on Sunday, but would also talk about ghosts, spirits and the evil eye, which they really believed in. I grew up with a rather vivid family mythology; that pagan overlay was much deeper and scarier.

Probably because of this background, I'm drawn to certain eccentric art. The Catholic Church is full of this bizarre, bloody imagery, this nutty iconography. If you read any of the lives of the saints, my God, what a bunch of kooks. I'm convinced that the majority of the saints in the Catholic pantheon were all nuts or insane. I think many of them were schizophrenic, hearing voices and having visions.



Fred Stonehouse, *Kann Er Was*
1995, acrylic on panel, 18 x 12"

KV: Do you have any new interests that have affected your work in any way?

FS: Lately I've been drawn to art brut, art of the insane, psychotic and schizophrenic art. All the art of untrained people has always interested me—outsider art, American folk art, Mexican folk art. Even though I draw a lot from trained artists, I always find more in the way of creative ways of looking at the world in folk art and work by untrained artists. Even in Spanish colonial painting by painters who were technically trained, there's always something out of kilter. They don't follow the same rules and that's why it's freeing to look at.

My interest in the art of the insane may have had something to do, at least unconsciously, with me throwing out my self-made rules and deciding to open it up and make things a little wackier. These new paintings have a different edge to them. They have more humor in them, but they have more of an edge. The work's always been about things that are just a little out of whack, something that's not quite right; it continues to have that "what's wrong with this picture" quality.

All I'm doing is following my nose. And that's really a nice thing to be able to do—to go wherever it takes me. Luckily, it's been taking me in good directions. I've always trusted that.

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GALLERY NEWS > ARTIST NEWS > GALLERY NEWS > ARTIST NEWS > GALLERY NEWS

> Lisa Sette Gallery welcomes its new installationist, Malcolm Lightner. Malcolm recently moved to Arizona from Savannah, Georgia, to attend the MFA program in Photography at Arizona State University, Tempe. He received a BFA in Photography at Savannah College of Art and Design. Lightner's special areas of study were platinum/palladium printing and other non-silver processes, as well as advanced black and white printmaking. Malcolm, who cites his enjoyment of working with individual artists, has been working in the gallery field for the past three years. Malcolm replaces Mary Statzer, who is now administering the operations of Flight Zone Studios, a group of working artists' studio spaces in Phoenix.

The Circus

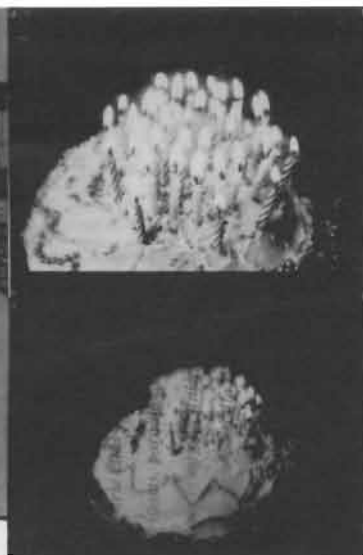
One is born with clothes
already on in the immediacy
of the measure of surviving
and that is how it walks
unshod in the air
building precariously
words that are decaying
emptiness that lacerates
sweats that evaporate the soul
One eats the moon like cheese
and is poisoned by the stars
One is the shipwreck
inside a bottle
the stare of the Cyclops eats us
One is the others
who dance the night tight rope
and show their tired eyes as clowns
and bark as trained dogs
One is the dwarf in the circus
the loud laughter
the dancer in the swing
One is craziness between the thighs of others
Or a rag doll, a drunken horse
We meet the others
and the threads become entangled...

And on the next morning or the following day
in front of the mirror
on that non-existent stage that we glance from this side of
our eyes
is the scenery of people hung
by their own umbilical cords.

Maria Santiago

Top: Luis Gonzalez Palma, detail from the cover image
Acariciando la Muerte (Caressing Death), gelatin silver print
with asphaltum, kodalith, 16 x 62"

Bottom: Luis Gonzalez Palma, *La Mirada Ausente (The
Absent Stare)*, 1995, gelatin silver print with asphaltum, 23 x
20"



FROM SHINING TO DARK TIMES... continued

embodiment of a prayer." With her sentimental genre pictures in mind, the costumes Palma has chosen for his models are more refined and romantic than in previous works. *La Mirada Ausente (The Absent Look)* shows us an androgynous young model wearing a pierrot collar, with long hair falling around the shoulders. The uncertainty of gender is overshadowed by the intense beauty and frank stare of the model. Palma's use of the camera here is more closely aligned with the mindset of the first photographers who considered the medium to have seemingly magic capabilities, and felt photography could affect an expression nearing revelation.

When translated, the poems inspiring this latest body of work are not literal references for Palma, that is, they do not lend concrete narrative or characters to Palma's work. It is more the feelings which well up from the poems that one "sees" in the works.

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EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

OCTOBER 5 - NOVEMBER 11, 1995

LUIS GONZALEZ PALMA
El Circo—Envenenado de Estrellas

THROUGH THE ARCH
MARK KLETT
Desert Legends

NOVEMBER 16 - DECEMBER 30, 1995
opening November 16 / 7-9 pm

KEVIN SLOAN
Poetry & Jasmine

THROUGH THE ARCH
RECENT EDITIONS: *Lorna Simpson, William Wegman, James Turrell, Enrique Chagoya, Claudia Bernardi, Frances Whitehead, Roy DeForest*

JANUARY 4 - 27, 1996
opening January 4 / 7-9 pm

FRED STONEHOUSE
Tener la de Malas

THROUGH THE ARCH
ARNALDO ROCHE RABELL
Recent Paintings on Canvas & Paper



KEVIN SLOAN
Poetry & Jasmine

Kevin Sloan has gained increasing acclaim for his highly emotive and masterful paintings. Like a travelogue of personal mythologies, Sloan's paintings resonate with poetic images of his thoughts on natural cycles, capturing significant moments of journeys such as afternoon to twilight.

Kevin Sloan, *The Garden Temple*, 1995,
acrylic on canvas, 24 x 20"

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THURSDAY 7:00 TO 9:00 PM
SATURDAY NOON TO 5:00 PM