



Artists Speak: Arturo Herrera

Born
1959, Caracas, Venezuela

Education
BA, University of Tulsa,
Tulsa, OK
MFA, University of Illinois at
Chicago, Chicago, IL

Lives and Works
New York, New York &
Berlin, Germany

Media & Materials
Drawing, Painting,
Photography, Collage

Biography
Arturo Herrera's work includes collage, work on paper, sculpture, relief, wall painting, photography, and felt wall hangings. His work taps into the viewer's unconscious, often intertwining fragments of cartoon characters with abstract shapes and partially obscured images that evoke memory and recollection. For his collages he uses found images from cartoons, coloring books, and fairy tales, combining fragments of Disney-like characters with sometimes dark or violent imagery to make work that borders between figuration and abstraction and subverts the supposed innocence of cartoon references. Herrera's wall paintings also meld recognizable imagery with abstraction, but on an environmental scale that he compares to the qualities of dance and music.

"Being Latin American, you're made up of so many fragments from different cultures. Venezuelan culture is extremely complex. And then you're part of Latin America, and part of America itself. The European tradition is part of you because you came from there. The way that you are fragmented inside makes you stronger. I see it as a positive thing. It just informs who I am. And being born in Latin America and living in the United States, you get accustomed to accents and the way people speak. Fragments of voice intonation, the way they pronounce and use words. I find it very rich to be able to identify those fragments of language. So maybe fragmentation and the way language gets transformed and recycled could be informative to my work...a correlation between the visual language I use and spoken language—the way we clearly identify a huge amount of information through very short gestures or intonations of voices or fragments of words. The visual fragment carries a lot of associative meaning in the same way."

Untitled, 2002. Collage (Paint and painted paper), 14 x 11 inches. Courtesy Sikkema, Jenkins & Co, New York.



"I think my interest in popular culture, cartoons, and signs, developed because these elements were easily accessible. They're inexpensive. They were all around in stores—Salvation Armys, Goodwills. So you could actually make works very cheaply using glue, scissors, and paper. So that allowed me to be able to cut and find fragments that were richer than the actual pages where they came from. Juxtaposing those fragments created other images with surprising effects. So then I kept going"

"To be able to paste two or three pieces of paper, you have to achieve that through cutting. But I think the most essential part of collage is imposing or juxtaposing—to glue a piece of paper on top of another piece of paper. So that is the essential aspect of collage. Cutting allows you to concentrate on the essence of the fragment that you want to isolate. But collaging means gluing, that's really the most important thing. That's when the images are actually formed, when they're actually joined together for good."



Untitled, 2002. Collage (gouache on paper), 9-1/4 x 7 inches. Private collection. Courtesy Sikkema, Jenkins & Co, NY.



Untitled, 1998. Mixed Media collage on paper. 12 x 9 inches. Courtesy Sikkema, Jenkins & Co, New York

"Since there is no direction—usually no title—you're basically looking at this with your baggage of intellectual knowledge and your memories, desires and emotional life, all combined. So you make your own collage and then you bring it to the piece. You juxtapose yourself—attach yourself—to the image and then a new thing is created. You are fragmented, and the piece comes from fragmentation. And what I want is that this experience of the fragmented person and the fragmented image becomes a new whole, a hybrid experience. Nothing is ever sure in life.... So I'm playing with that idea of ambiguity and uncertainty. And I'm welcoming that."



Art:21 Production Stills, © Art21, 2005.

art:21
ART IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Art21, Inc. is a non-profit contemporary art organization serving students, teachers, and the general public. Art21 produces the Emmy-nominated, nationally broadcast PBS series *Art:21—Art in the Twenty-First Century*, a wide range of education materials, and outreach programs. This multi-faceted project introduces audiences to a diverse range of contemporary visual artists working in the United States today and to the art they are producing now.



For more ways to use Art21 in your classroom, check out:



Season One, Two and Three on VHS and DVD: to order call (800) 533-2847

Free Art21 Educators' Guides:
www.pbs.org/art21/education/teachingmaterials



Find lesson plans and ideas for the classroom on the Art21 Web site and Online Lesson Library:

www.pbs.org/art21/education



Art21 slide sets from Davis Art Images: Call (800) 533-2847 ext. 253 to place your order.