

**ADRIAN ESPARZA**

January 29 – March 6, 2004

“Adrian Esparza imbues the materials and processes of the decorative and popular arts with conceptual potency. His methodologies and titles suggest that opposites come together in a passing from one place, time and state of mind to another.”

— Kate Bonansinga  
Exhibition Curator

As Director of University Galleries at the University of Texas, El Paso, Kate Bonansinga cultivates a promising environment for artists to prosper in. She has chosen Adrian Esparza, a participant in the Dallas Museum of Art’s survey show, *Come Forward: Emerging Art in Texas*, for exhibition at CUE because his innovative mixed-media paintings and sculptures warrant greater recognition.

Adrian Esparza was born, raised, and currently lives in El Paso, one of the most densely populated bi-national regions in the world. His encounters with a political divide marked by socio-economic disparity lead him to question commonly accepted boundaries and hierarchies, and create a cross-cultural visual language which investigates the junctures between high and low art.

Much of his source materials are derived from his surrounding environment and are craft based. Esparza transforms everyday objects into surreal observations that are both challenging and fascinating. His revelations often explore the underlining meaning of his experiences and beliefs, from the quotidian realities of living along the border, to the theoretical probability of rhizomes, and the totality of the Big Bang theory.

*In Up and Over*, 2004, for example, Esparza mounts an inexpensive Mexican serape purchased from the mercado in Juarez to the wall. He then unravels its bottom portion and guides the piece of cotton thread through a maze of nails affixed to the wall nearby to create a parallel form. By unraveling the blanket only to reweave it into a geometric painting, he alters the perception from that of an everyday Mexican product to that of a modernist abstraction of aesthetic relevance.

Biographical concerns, along with the process of deconstruction and reconstruction, are also addressed in the artist’s ceramic sculptures. By choosing ceramic figurines as subjects, Esparza pays tribute to his grandmother, who taught decorative ceramic craft classes at a local detention center. Casting liquid clay into hobbyist molds, he then dismantles the resulting figurines before the clay is completely dry, and reassembles the parts into surreal plant, animal and other organic matter combinations. In *Come and See*, 2003, human heads, birds, a sombrero, and other recognizable forms protrude from the head and body of a resting rabbit.

(Over, please)

The uniform, unglazed white ceramic veneers serve as sterile counterparts to the vibrantly colored serapes, while cloaking the complexity of their odd forms. By presenting several of his sculptural pieces in groupings, arranging them in a basket like a centerpiece, or onto a narrow platform mounted directly onto casters, he implies a relationship based on both social mobility and community. Yet, by placing them at ankle height, he again uses composition to subvert the traditional relationship between viewer and artwork.

A third component of this body of work involves elaborate drawings rendered on mass-manufactured textile goods. The artist photocopies one of his drawings onto a transparency, projects the rendering onto a wall-mounted, full-sized, white bed sheet, and then traces the transmitted images with black fabric paint. Industrial imagery in the form of machine parts and smoke stacks, inspired by the now-defunct copper smelt that towers over El Paso's western outskirts, crowd together with human figures and appear to be in an evolutionary state, morphing into one another as to almost entirely engulf their backdrop. Here, as in the other works, form, intention, content, material and process are all held together in a tenuous balance.

Esparza refers to his works as "notions," perhaps to lend them a sense of chance and superstition, and numbers them in reverse, like anonymous products of descending importance. Yet, what results from these "notions" is beyond the ordinary. Esparza constructs an environment of production and according to the artist, "by inviting the viewer to enter this realm, the object fractures, and through the process of evaluation; particles that exist in this fragile environment unite to form acceptable interpretations of events." These notions are transformed and, according to Esparza, "emerge as fresh forms that reflect the migratory process of production."

Adrian Esparza currently lives and works in El Paso, TX, where he was born in 1970. In 1996, he received a BFA from the University of Texas at El Paso, and then graduated in 1998 with an MFA from the California Institute for the Arts. In 2003, he was included in the Texas Dialogues: San Antonio - El Paso - Denton exhibition at the Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, TX, as well as, Come Forward: Emerging Artists in Texas at the Dallas Museum of Art, TX. In 2002, Esparza participated in the Border Art Residency Program, La Union in New Mexico. He currently teaches Design and Drawing at the University of Texas at El Paso, Design and Art Appreciation at El Paso Community College and Drawing at the El Paso Museum of Art.

CUE Art Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, provides educational and professional development programs in the visual arts. These include student internships, stipends, exhibitions, public lectures, and an in-gallery studio program, all of which draw from the talents and experience of the diverse community of artists, art critics, and teachers that the foundation brings together.

CUE's exhibition season gives unknown or under-recognized artists public and professional exposure comparable to that offered by neighboring commercial galleries, without the usual financial restraints. The Advisory Council, an honorary group of artists and leading figures from the arts education, applied arts, art history, and literary communities, has the responsibility of selecting exhibition curators. The curators, in turn, nominate artists to exhibit at CUE, and continue to play a role throughout the exhibition process. Both the Advisory Council and the exhibition curators actively participate in the public lectures and educational programs. For additional information, please contact Jeremy Adams, Gallery Director / Sandhini Poddar, Gallery Assistant, CUE Art Foundation, (212) 206-3583.

Upcoming Exhibitions:

March 11 – April 17, 2004 Thaddeus Mosley: Selected by Nathaniel Mackey