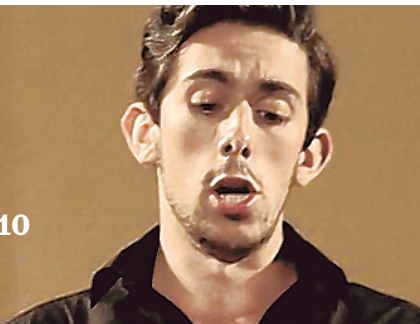


ARTS & BOOKS

A SHAKY FOOTNOTE TO AN AMBROSE LEGACY
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ON VIEW



Images from Pasadena Museum of California Art

NAUTICAL: Robert Sato's "Land Admiral Levebvre's Fleet Makes Sail" is in ink, watercolor, acrylic and gouache on paper.

Art runs through it

LIESL BRADNER

One of Chaz Bojórquez's fondest childhood memories is of climbing down into the L.A. River basin around Highland Park, running and sliding in 2 inches of water enclosed in a moss-covered tunnel — his "Tom Sawyer swimming pool," as he called it.

For many Angelenos the L.A. River is just another concrete surface viewed from their car windows. A waterless paved gorge filled with graffiti, grit and vagrants but also a sentimental symbol of the city's cinematic history that provided a convenient location for movies such as "Terminator 2," "Grease" and "Transformers."

For Bojórquez and other L.A. artists, it was a place for childhood adventures, an escape from the city and inspiration for creating art. A collection of work inspired by the waterway has been captured at "The Ulysses Guide to the Los Angeles River" at the Pasadena Museum of California Art through July 4.

Reflective of Los Angeles, the exhibition is a vibrant, cross section of more than 25 pieces of watercolors, charcoal drawings, sculpture, Masonite elements, draft designs, acrylics, spray paint, photography and even an "oil on cockroach."

The art includes a peacock sketch by tattoo artist Jack Rudy, Dennis Kunkel's microscopic images of a pill bug and Evan Skrederstu's oil painting "River Tropical," an island fantasy of a hammocked hippie relaxing along the shore.

Bojórquez, considered one of L.A.'s first graffiti artists and the oldest in show at 61, briefly attended Chouinard Art Institute (now known as CalArts). His work has been featured



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW: Chaz Bojórquez's "Arroyo Seco/Mexico Dreams" is enamel and oil paints on linen.

at the Smithsonian and LACMA. "I found my cultural identity in the river," said Bojórquez, who first discovered its beauty and nature walking in the middle of the night to hide from the police. "The broken bottles sparkling in the light of the moon and the sound of the water and speeding cars was very romantic," Bojórquez recalled.

In the early 20th century, floods wreaked havoc on the city, so in 1938 the Army Corps of

Engineers began paving the river. Detractors believed the transformation created a different kind of havoc as a playground for gangs, delinquents and the homeless.

For research, Steve Martinez and fellow artists and curators Skrederstu and Christopher D. Brand hiked the 51 miles of the river bed, which stretches from Canoga Park through downtown and ends in Long Beach. Except for a few run-ins with seedy survivalists and coyotes, they encountered exotic fauna, insects, reptiles and egrets.

The endless white space provided a huge canvas for anyone enticed to venture into the depths and express their creativity. "There were some beautiful murals down there from 15 to 20 years ago we were able to capture before they painted them over," said Martinez, referring to a project by the city to rid the river walls and embankments of gang tags.

The exhibition, based on a book of the same name, re-creates the experience of being in the river with trash, plants, exposed concrete, birds' nests and green muck integrated along the gallery floor, ceiling and corners with a piped-in soundscape of running water, traffic and birds.

"Survivors of the Massacre" is an acrylic painting by Martinez and Skrederstu of a teddy bear and plastic elephant found at the bottom of the river. Bags of worn-out stuffed animals had been tossed over a wall resulting in a calamitous explosion of stuffing and fur. Also discovered on the trek were hobo etchings that dated as far back as 1914. Said Martinez, "It's a natural thing for a person to say 'I existed in this world' and leave their mark."

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CULTURE MONSTER

Stage is a refuge for Holbrook

Less than four weeks after the death of his wife, actress Dixie Carter, Hal Holbrook was back on stage at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza this week, performing his classic one-man show "Mark Twain Tonight!" The 85-year-old Oscar-nominated, Tony-winning actor was scheduled to do it again this weekend in Twain's hometown of Hannibal, Mo.

You've been playing Mark Twain on stage for more than 40 years. What does the role mean to you now and how do you keep the character fresh?

The easiest way to describe what it means to me is like this: When I sit in a hotel room, listening to the news, and listening to the idiots blabber in what they like to call "news" ... if I didn't have Twain to go on stage and attack this kind of foolishness, I would end up in the nuthouse.

In what ways is Twain relevant today?

The role gives me the opportunity to hit certain targets that need to be hit. I didn't have to update the material and I still don't have to. Let me recite to you something that he wrote about big business — he once described the behavior that goes on there as "the



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

TROUPER: Hal Holbrook has portrayed Mark Twain for 40 years.

limitless rottenness of our financial institutions on Wall Street where theft has been practiced as a profession by our most influential commercial men."

How do you think the financial sector has failed this country?

It's terrible that this country, which developed this great system of capitalism, is giving way to greed. We're going to pay for it and pay for it and it may be too late to stop.

That echoes what your character in "Wall Street" said — that the thing about money "is that it makes you do things you don't want to do."

Well, that role was modeled after Oliver Stone's father, who worked in the industry. Isn't it amazing? That movie came out more than 20 years ago, and here we are today. Everything we're going through now — it's a repeat. That's the cosmic joke.

You've returned to the stage less than a month since [your wife] passed away.

Look ... I need to work. If I don't work, I could sit down and contemplate suicide. My wife was no quitter ... she would be telling me to get out there to do my work and that's what I'm doing. So that's the main thing — to keep working, to keep trying to figure out how to do this job right.

—DAVID NG



IN BLOOM: "Old Cover," acrylic on board, is part of an exhibition in Pasadena of works inspired by and created in the L.A. River.