

## The Dallas Morning News

### Artists draw on Mexican lore for message in works

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1. (Courtesy of **Rosemary Meza**) A detail of **Rosemary Meza's** large wall piece titled *Last Supper* shows the delicacy of the artist's work

Creative minds give rise to bizarre visions at 500X Gallery as Dallas artists **Steve Cruz** and **Rosemary Meza** depict contradictory forces inherent in Mexican culture and society as a whole. Both deal in veiled narrative, but the underlying message is clear: Repression leads to lust in the age-old battle between spirit and flesh. The show takes its title, "The Passion of Santos/The Ecstasy of Malinche," from characters representing two polarities in Mexican lore. Mr. Cruz builds his ambiguous saga around Santos, a pop-culture hero in the form of a masked luchador, or wrestler, who struts his stuff. Ms. Meza creates an even more enigmatic story around Malinche, a legendary figure with both maternal and whorish instincts, whom she alternately portrays as a symbol of female empowerment and the victim of a male-dominated society.

The artists' styles differ dramatically - Mr. Cruz's pseudo-erotic paintings have the ironic edge of comics, whereas Ms. Meza's layered images of figures, faces and body parts are lyrical allegories. But each artist deals in extremes emanating from the subconscious. And both imply that sublimation doesn't work.

Mr. Cruz plays on the stereotyped posturing of pop-culture heroes - his characters, who also include a hippopotamus in a business suit and teams of low-rider bikers and guitar players, move through a dream world, their catatonic state suggested by the constant presence of the jagged pattern used to register surprise in comic strips.

The fact that these larger-than-life incidents take place in paintings little bigger than pieces of typewriter paper adds to the irony of the situation. And the sense that all of life's a play is accentuated by the intermittent inclusion of papier-mache heads with skewed facial features, some takeoffs of kitsch objects suspended from rear-view mirrors in cars but others the size of pinatas.

By contrast Ms. Meza's drawings, which are generally large-scale, have a delicacy that belies their ominous content. Done in faint pastel shades of crayon and pencil, they appear - at least from a distance - to be poetic reveries tied to the Catholic faith. In fact, one large wall piece takes the form of a Last Supper. And the most ambitious piece, executed directly on three walls of one room, includes an image of a martyred saint or "virgin."

Freudian allusions abound as well - references to Eve and the apple recur throughout Ms. Meza's work, and there's a whole tangled web of intrigue built around temptations of the flesh.

One of the more impressive features of this show is the artists' ability to translate subjects reflective of their own cultural heritage in terms that anyone can appreciate. By freeing their own imaginations and letting hidden thoughts surface, so to speak, Ms. Meza and Mr. Cruz encourage their audience to do the same.

#### EXHIBITION INFORMATION

"The Passion of Santos/The Ecstasy of Malinche: Recent Works by **Steve Cruz** and **Rosemary Meza**" is on view through Sunday at 500X Gallery, 500 Exposition Ave. Open from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and weekdays by appointment. Free. Call 214-828-1111.

**PHOTO(S):** 1. (Courtesy of **Rosemary Meza**) A detail of **Rosemary Meza's** large wall piece titled *Last Supper* shows the delicacy of the artist's work, on display at 500X Gallery. 2. **Steve Cruz's** *Low Rider Bikers*, a detail of which is above, has aspects of a comic strip.;