

Notes on Looking

Contemporary Art in Los Angeles

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Mexico D.F. Part I: LA/Mex Connection: Barry Wolfryd

Posted on [January 2, 2012](#), by [Carlyn Aguilar](#)



From Barry Wolfryd's solo show "Transferencias"; Photo by Daniel Lara

LA and Mexico City are like cousins, related and connected, and one really special way is through art. Both cities are bursting with culture and both have art scenes that are dynamic and thriving. Some (lucky) artists have a relationship to both and so while I was in DF, I decided to look for these links, *como un miembro de la familia*, and find the connections.

One such artist came to mind: [Barry Wolfryd](#). Barry was born in Los Angeles but then moved to Mexico DF in 1975 and has continued to live there ever since. Luckily I got to see his solo show *Transferencias* at Ethra Gallery in Colonia Juarez during its final week. First of all, Barry is wonderful to talk to because he switches between English and Spanish like a true master of Spanglish. And if that's not enough, his slang in both languages is purely Angeleno and Chilango. It's pretty impressive *güey*!



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As you walk into Ethra, a beautiful two story gallery, 20 large black and white paintings stare you down... and I really do mean that, as the theme that runs

throughout the show is dark and violent: narcos and gang culture. However, Wolfryd cleverly and playfully takes icons from Mexican and American culture, adds the reality of violence by using its symbols (such as tattoos, graffiti and weapons) and then humorously reminds us how these exact symbols have infiltrated our everyday lives and pop culture. The graffiti might tell you a message or what group a person belongs to, but it's mixed with all the other gangs' tags, merging into one big gang that shouts out a whole new meaning. Wolfryd plays with this message by putting all these symbols on a teddy bear, Cantinflas, El Santo, even John Wayne (dressed as a Salvatrucha). New roles are passed out, unmasked, tattooed and made visible. In one painting a table is perfectly set for what is going to be either a grand meal or a grand duel. Silverware has been replaced by machine guns, scissors, ice picks, nails, knives, bullets, and fingers... Would Martha Stewart be impressed? (I think so, especially now that she knows what inmate life is like.)



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Wolfryd uses black and white paint to show this duality between the two realities that live together. One reality is transferred to another and because this is so subliminal in our culture, at the end of the day we don't even realize it. Narco corridos are being hummed while passengers wait for their combi, kids walk around urban cities with a "gangster look" because it's cool. So then we begin to wonder what's the problem if John Wayne is dressed as a Mara Salvatrucha. It all seems to make sense.



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