



Oso malo - bad teddy



Todo las cosas son iguales - all things being equal



Cambio de cuadriláteros - change of rings

BY JULIET LAMBERT  
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#### Global Culture

The violent and turbulent world of Latino gangs – both in Mexico and the United States – was the topic of Barry Wolfryd's latest exhibit, "Transferencias" ("Transferences"), a group of 20 monochromatic paintings he presented last month at the Ethra Gallery in Colonia Juárez.

The stark, black-and-white collection included images of gang tattoos, weapons and gang symbols combined with icons of popular culture, a reflection of the Mexico City-based Wolfryd's combined fascination with and repulsion of violence and consumerism in contemporary society.

Curator Lisander Martínez described the exhibition as a fusion of two layers of Mexican reality, one revolving around the crime and political unrest that is reported on daily in the media, and the other focusing on the commercial culture of a burgeoning urban society.

"Wolfryd explores the apparent disassociation of those who are committing the violence and those who are spectators of it," she said.

# LATINO GANGS IN BLACK AND WHITE

Barry Wolfryd captures the culture of Latino gangs from both sides of the U.S.- Mexican border



Sombrero piteado - stitched sombrero

"His works shows the viewer that there are moments in which one layer is filtered through the other."

One of the pieces in the collection, titled "Unitalla Para Todos" ("One Size Fits All"), is a white button-down shirt covered with gang symbols and a metal chain. The idea is that anyone can put on a shirt and become a gang member and that identity is transferrable.

"I was jesting and poking fun with this one," explained Wolfryd during the opening of the exhibit.

"The tattoos all come from the Barrio Azteca gang, based in Ciudad Juárez and the El Paso area."

Wolfryd said that he chose the name "Transferencias" for the show because he has noticed how gang culture is slowly being transferred into the everyday life of people in Mexico and the United States, most of whom are

unaware that they are being influenced by this subculture of society.

"English, the term transference can be used both as a psychological term and a banking term," he said. "I was exploring the gang culture that is transferring its iconographic imagery on to larger society."

He went on to say that many Latino gangs have their own production companies for clothing and music, and they are making their own art.

"In other words, they are promoting themselves, using their symbols and colors to manufacture products with their image."

Although Wolfryd has often been called a bicultural artist, straddling between Mexico and his native United States, he dismisses that title.

"People call me bicultural because they don't have any other term to

describe me," he said. "I have lived in Mexico since 1985 and I just paint what is around me, what affects me...I am not Latino or Chicano, so they don't know what to call me. I been refused participation in Latino shows in the United States because my last name isn't Sanchez or Mendoza. But that is changing. Now, savvy art gallery owners and curators know that artists can be living anywhere in the world. They don't have to use labels like 'she's an English artist' or 'he's a Mexican artist.' Those types of narrow classifications are becoming meaningless."

Wolfryd said that although he used specifically Latino gang imagery in this show, the phenomenon of gang culture is universal.

"I am sure that something similar is going on in Russia, China and Japan," he said. "Gang affiliation is not just a



La reina de todo o nada - the queen of all or nothing



Unitalla para todo - one size fits all



Un nuevo papel - a new role

U.S. and Mexico thing."

Wolfryd said that he learned about Latino gang culture by researching police files both in the United States and Mexico.

He said he learned to interpret the meanings behind tattoos, which gangs they refer to and the neighborhood in which those gangs operate.

"The media only reports statistics – how many people were killed here or that there was a shooting there," he said. "But what interests me is who these people are, how they view themselves and how they promote their lifestyle."

One of the pieces in the collection, titled "Comida Informal" ("Informal Dinner"), shows a table with place settings made out of knives, guns, syringes, screwdrivers, nooses and finger bowls of bullets.

Wolfryd said that it is meant to be a commentary on how power and resources get divided up among key gang players.

"I was imagining how these gangs are organized," he said. "Just imagine sitting down to lunch with these guys. How would it go? The distribution of influence and organization of power is what interested me."

PHOTOS/COURTESY OF BARRY WOLFTRYD