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The Arts

'Maverick' and 'Caballeros' new at Autry Center

On November 23, 2008

In the complex mosaic that makes up the Los Angeles museum scene, the Autry National Center plays a unique role

BY JIM FARBER >STAFF WRITER

In the complex mosaic that makes up the Los Angeles museum scene, the Autry National Center plays a unique role. Combining extensive collections of Western and Native American art with historic objects and a treasure trove of movie memorabilia, the Autry is equally comfortable devoting an exhibit to the spaghetti Westerns of Sergio Leone, the role played by minorities in the Western movement, firearms of the wild West, or 150 years of Yosemite in art.

"We have a unique opportunity here," says Jonathan Spaulding, executive director of the Autry's Museum of the American West. "We're not bound by the conventions of a fine-art museum or a history museum. We enjoy mixing things up in terms of high culture and pop culture."

The Autry's flair for eclecticism is currently demonstrated in a pair of exhibitions: "Maverick Art," which showcases acquisitions of contemporary art made over the

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last two decades; and "Bold Caballeros y Noble Bandidas" a pistol-packin' show that explores the impact of those dashing Latino (and Latina) outlaws - from Joaquin Murrieta to the Cisco Kid.

"The noble bandit," says Spaulding, "is the outlaw that is struggling to maintain a sense of cultural identity and power in a situation that isn't necessarily conducive to that purpose. These people are heroes in all different mediums. So we feature films and movie posters, fine art, music, poetry, along with historic artifacts and costumes. That way we can have Joaquin Murrieta's pistol next to the Mexican Revolution woodcuts of Jose Guadalupe Posada and George Yepes' painting (made famous by the band Los Lobos), 'La Pistola y el Corazon.' We think it's a wonderful way to let people see the connections between the imagery and the history of Hispanic resistance."

For curator Gary D. Keller, director of the Hispanic Research Center at Arizona State University, the lines separating historical figures like Pancho Villa and fictional heroes like the Cisco Kid are fluid.

"There really is no difference. It's simply a question of gradation," say Keller, sitting in front of Duncan Renaldo's Cisco Kid finery.

"The real people, like Murrieta, Zapata and Villa, became mythologized in novels and movies, while you can find bloodlines based in real history for almost every fictional character, whether it's Zorro or the Cisco Kid. That's what this exhibit is all about."

The Autry's second exhibition, "Maverick Art," was born of a simple premise, says Amy Scott, curator of visual arts.

"It gives us a chance to look at the contemporary art collections we have been putting together for the past two decades," she explains standing before Fritz Sholder's provocative 1978 painting, "Matinee Cowboy, Posing."

"It also provides a broad perspective so we can see what themes are emerging, what issues are the most interesting, and how they connect to the historic collections."

Works by 50 different artists have been divided into three thematic sections: "Icons Past and Present," "Religion and Ritual" and "Land and Landscape." The range of expression within these categories, however, is vast.

Maynard Dixon's 1922 painting, "Iesaka Waken," depicts the figure of an American Indian towering above a Southwest mesa. In counterpoint, Michael Scott's 2005 painting, "Lady Luck," superimposes an American Indian warrior on horseback

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against a firestorm of Las Vegas lights and cultural mayhem.

In the section devoted to landscape, the large-scale Grand Canyon paintings of Wilson Hurley hark back to the 19th-century work of Albert Bierstadt, while James Doolin's "Bridges" transforms a Los Angeles freeway overpass into a bravura study of the man-made landscape.

José Benjamín Lopez's carved wooden "Crucifix" (1980) dominates an entire gallery wall, the writhing figure mirroring the tortured art of the Penitentes.

Photography also plays an important role in the Autry collections. The exhibit features many strong images including Yosemite studies by John Divola, Richard Misrach and Mark Klett, along with a series of toy cowboy studies by David Levinthall, from his "Wild West Series."

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preview >

MAVERICK ART and BOLD CABALLEROS Y NOBLE BANDIDAS

>**Where:** Autry National Center, 4700 Western Heritage Way, Los Angeles.

>**When:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. "Maverick Art" through Jan. 4; "Caballeros y Bandidas" through May 10.

>**Cost:** \$9, \$5 for seniors and students, \$3 for children.

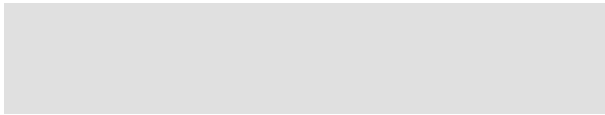
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