

**DISTANT RELATIONS: CHICANO, IRISH AND MEXICAN ART AND CRITICAL WRITING** / Edited by Trisha Ziff.--Santa Monica, CA: Smart Art Press, dist. by D. A. P., 1995.--285 p.: ill., plus 1 CD.--ISBN 0-9646426-1-1: n.p.

*Distant Relations* is about languages -- the visual, textual, and aural expressions of Chicana/o, Irish and Mexican (trans)national cultures. Defending and maintaining these cultural identities in the face of hegemony is the overarching theme.

*Distant Relations* includes essays by 21 authors, including Amalia Mesa-Bains, Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams, and Elena Poniatowska, and 12 visual artists, including John Valadez, Frances Hegarty, and Silvia Gruner. The anthology serves as the catalogue for the internationally traveling exhibition, "Distant Relations/Cercanías Distances/Clann I gCéin: A Dialogue Among Chicano, Irish and Mexican Artists." As the anthology reveals, the affinities between these cultural groups are (surprisingly) many. But the real common ground, according to Lucy Lippard in her introduction, is "the retention of a mixed, still powerful and often romanticized identity that is layered beneath the surfaces of modernity and internationalism -- an identity manipulated as often in popular as in 'high' culture." Included in the anthology is a compact disc of two "sound works" by composers Roger Doyle and Manuel Rocha Iturbide. The visual art and essays in *Distant Relations* makes the music all the more intertextually significant. Here, the cacophony of Chicana/o, Irish and Mexican "identity/hybridity" is given aural form.

Authors Cuauhtémoc Medina, Joan Fowler, and Max Benavidez have written specifically about the artists and their work, including Javier de la Garza, Rubén Ortiz Tórreres, Alice Maher, John Kindness, Amalia Mesa-Bains, and Daniel J. Martinez. Of all the artwork, murals continue to provide a space where visual and textual language have broad community visibility. In two essays which focus on this artform, Bill Rolston and Eva Sperling Cockcroft examine the similarities and differences of murals created by "organic intellectuals" from West Belfast and East L.A. In addressing not only the question of which language to use in the anthology (ultimately a hybridized European/American English won out) but in whose voice the artwork shall be presented, *Distant Relations* includes writings by the visual and musical artists, interspersed throughout the anthology as "Artists'- and Composers' Pages." In other essays about Chicana/o, Irish and Mexican cultures in general, "the empire writes back," providing a framework which extends the themes and issues of colonialism in which the exhibition is sited.

Several of the authors in the anthology will be familiar to North American readers. Lucy Lippard, the well-known contemporary art historian, addresses the notion of hybridity in *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990). Other essayists in *Distant Relations*, including Richard Rodriguez, Mary J. Hickman, David Lloyd, and Rubén Martínez, have been previously published and their writings are cited in the bibliographic section, Selected Books Published by Participating Authors.

*Distant Relations* has engaging writing, provocative visual art, and resonant music. It also has some drawbacks. Overall, the anthology is unbalanced, with Irish art and culture

over-represented. In addition, Chicana/o art is presented solely from a West Coast perspective, leaving out other regional cultural productions. The bibliography is weighted in favor of Chicanas/os and Irish, lacking in references to works about Mexico by Mexicans. Finally, Lucy Lippard and Trisha Ziff acknowledge that the missing link in this anthology is the Irish American. I agree. But, after all, one anthology/exhibition cannot do it all. The pitfalls of attempting to be panoptic are many.

Notwithstanding its multiple proofreaders, the anthology has some typographical (and other) errors. Readers may find some of the type size too small (in particular, the footnotes). Nonetheless, *Distant Relations* is a very readable anthology. For the most part it is free from insider jargon, making it accessible to a wide readership. I would recommend it for students -- undergraduate, graduate, and the broader public -- of art history, ethnic studies, comparative literature, cultural studies, and museology. For readers interested in the global discussion about art, culture and identity, one of the venues for the exhibition, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Gil, created a page on the World Wide Web (<http://www.conet.com.mx/macg/INDEX.HTM>) to provide an international platform for a discussion raised by the exhibition and catalogue.

Despite some drawbacks, I highly recommend this anthology as a library addition. As the first publication to compare Chicana/o, Irish and Mexican art and popular culture, *Distant Relations* provides a model of critical writing and exhibition practice as we look to the emerging global shift from local to transcultural aesthetics.

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