

**For Immediate Release**  
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***Assembling the Pieces: Reconstructing Memory & Hybrid Identity***

**New Work by Tessie Barrera-Scharaga and Samuel Rodriguez**

**Exhibition Dates:** January 16 – March 16, 2013

MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana is pleased to present *Assembling the Pieces: Reconstructing Memory & Hybrid Identity*, featuring new work by San Jose-based artists Tessie Barrera-Scharaga and Samuel Rodriguez. The work presented in *Assembling the Pieces* addresses themes of transformation, identity, memory, and the human experience. Barrera-Scharaga and Rodriguez are among San Jose's most industrious and innovative artists; this exhibition highlights their significant contributions to our artistic landscape.

Tessie Barrera-Scharaga is a conceptual installation and assemblage artist that creates site-specific and time-based environments using a wide variety of media from found and rescued objects, clay, steel, wood, sound, photography, and video. Her often unexpected pairings channel and challenge the viewers' collective memory; a chair obliterated by the lines of a poem; a wedding gown covered in red clay; a house bandaged in surgical gauze. Themes of feminism, consumerism, violence, loss, and environmental concerns are just a few of the subjects her work approaches. At the core, her work is about the human experience. According to Barrera-Scharaga, "Human stories inspire me, fill me with admiration, and also terrify me. My work is at times painful, at times joyful, and always viscerally attached to the realities of contemporary life...." Love and loss, desire, doubts, hopes, frustrations, life, death, transformation, and transcendence color her installations. Barrera-Scharaga navigates the personal, political, social, environmental and symbolic through her provocative art work.

Situated in the center of the gallery, *Coffee: The Malady of Third World Dreaming/Café: La Angustia de un Sueño Tercer Mundista* (2011); explores El Salvador's complex history with coffee production. According to Barrera-Scharaga, coffee shaped El Salvador's early economy for two centuries placing it, at one time, 4<sup>th</sup> amongst coffee producing countries. This all came to a dramatic halt in the mid 1980's as El Salvador found itself locked in a bloody civil war. Dreams of prosperity came crashing down. Seventy-five thousand people dead and a nation left in shambles. As a fourth generation coffee grower, her mother's dreams came to an end. Her farm was one of the casualties.

In, *Coffee: The Malady of Third World Dreaming/Café: La Angustia de un Sueño Tercer Mundista* (2011); Barrera-Scharaga has created a multi-layered installation filled with images of El Salvador's coffee laborers both adult and child. Their hardened faces speak of a life of intense manual labor. A bed rests in-between hanging cloth scrolls and hovering mid-air like something out of a dream. A mattress made from an empty coffee bag from El Salvadoran produced coffee beans provides support. Directly below the bed rests coffee beans arranged to look like a spill. We see both the reality of hard labor on the faces of the young child and the older man who work El Salvador's coffee farms but also the idea of the dream of upward prosperity that moves people forward even past the atrocities of civil war but dreams have the potential to give birth to nightmares.

*Broken* (2010) and *12-14-12: In Memoriam* (2013) address themes of loss. *12-14-12: In Memoriam* is the artist's response to the recent school shooting in Connecticut. This event became a trigger for Barrera-Scharaga to revisit an earlier work *Broken* (2010), on display which explores the connection between parent and child even after the loss of a child. The new work consists of two painted white articles of children's clothing, framed, and embellished with text that engulfs the space of the little boy and little girl's outfit. For Barrera-Scharaga white suggests breath and spirit. The text is a parent's wish list. This is a picture of the artist's solidarity with and empathy for the survivors of a traumatic experience.

*What was Left Behind/Lo Que Quedo Atrás* (2013), a mixed-media installation incorporating found objects, fabric and video explores themes of displacement and migration. Clothing, toys, bikes, suitcases, dolls and other objects each delicately wrapped and bound in satin have the appearance of precious material like pearls. These objects represent a point of one's life; childhood, youth, coming of age and the history and events attached to each which transcends their objectivity. For Barrera-Scharaga objects are also attached to place and a reminder of experiences denied in one's own homeland for a generation of El Salvadorans that were displaced due to war. Projected onto the installation is an image of flowing water a metaphor for displacement. Water has the potential to both push and pull, with great force, objects caught in its' path.

Tessie Barrera-Scharaga is a San Jose-based artist born in New York City of Colombian and Salvadoran parents. She grew up in both the United States and Latin America. She holds a BFA in Spatial Arts from San Jose State University, and an MFA in Studio Art from Mills College, Oakland, CA. As a professional artist she has shown her work extensively. She has also participated in art shows in the Bay Area, and abroad. Recent shows include Honoring Women's Rights at the National Steinbeck Center, Left to Chance: In Search of the Accidental Book Art at San Francisco Center for the Book, Breathed.....Unsaid.....at SOMArts Cultural Center, San Francisco, and The Seduction of Duchamp Exhibit featured at the 2011 San Francisco Art Fair. Barrera-Scharaga is also the recipient of grants from the Center for Cultural Innovation and the San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs.

Samuel Rodriguez explores the space of portraiture to raise questions of identity. Inspired by a portrait he created of his daughter who is of multi-ethnic heritage, Mexican-American and Vietnamese-American, Rodriguez explores portraiture in an anthropological manner and reflective of our diverse community. He states, "These portraits are anthropological in that they

are studies of people's acquired state of being." Rodriguez both deconstructs and constructs the portrait, from real sources, in an attempt to represent the complexities of identity in a multi-ethnic, multicultural society. Cultural symbols, signifiers, patterns, designs, text and multiple facial features construct his hybrid portraits. Rodriguez contends, "The work playfully juxtaposes several visual cues that we use in order to process information about people we see."

In Rodriguez's large scale installation, *Exploded View* (2013), he goes further in what he calls "fractioning," the breaking up of the figure or portrait by defined lines by moving his works into 3-dimensional, multi-layered, structural wall hangings, compositions composed of numerous smaller painted panels. For Rodriguez the move towards a 3-dimensional surface is a new direction from his prior 2-dimensional works. The work brought in new technical and logistic concerns in its' development and construction. Rodriguez also saw this as an opportunity to engage the space of the gallery through the interplay between the existing architecture, elements within the work and resulting shadows. When viewed from a distance the pieces coalesce to form a hybrid portrait.

In Rodriguez's mixed-media portrait paintings and drawings, *Face Chart 1, 2* (2012) and *Face Chart Experiments 1-6* (2012), he also employs dissection and addition as a strategy to create multi-layered images that function as topography and speak to the body as landscape. Pieces are cut away to reveal layers and materials are added to the surface. Design elements are incorporated into the portrait fluidly along with various textures, materials, symbols and text. Rodriguez is able to effectively weave multiple visual languages into the construction of his portraits, each existing harmoniously as part of a larger whole. The work challenges separations of physical, visual, symbolic and cultural borders to create a beautiful image of hybridity and a complex vision of identity.

Samuel Rodriguez is a San Jose-based artist whose practice encompasses a wide variety of media including illustration, design, murals, painting and drawing. From 2005-2007, Rodriguez worked with artist Mel Chin on a permanent installation for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library in San Jose, CA. More recently he has completed two additional permanent public art installations, one for the Los Angeles County Metro Authority at Jefferson Station and for San Jose's Solari Branch Library. Rodriguez's work has been exhibited extensively throughout the Bay Area including Anno Domini, Oakland Museum of Art, Known Gallery, MACLA and abroad with a solo exhibit in Hawaii and a two-person exhibit in Hong Kong, China. His artistic background ranges from a practitioner of graffiti art to working as a designer and illustrator. Rodriguez received a BFA degree from California College of the Arts, Oakland, CA.

**Special Donors Event:** February 1, 2013 at 6pm

Join us for a special donors talk and exhibition walk through with artists Tessie Barrera-Scharaga and Samuel Rodriguez. Become a MACLA donor today, call (408) 998-2783 x 28.

**Artist Talk:** March 2, 2013 at 7pm

Join us for an engaging artist talk

**Related Programs:**

**Material Memory Workshop\*** with Tessie Barrera-Scharaga: February 23, 2013 at 2pm.  
This workshop utilizes paper, clay, and found objects to explore memory.

**RE MIX/ED – Media Workshop\*** with Samuel Rodriguez: March 2, 2013 at 2pm.

This mixed-media workshop explores portraiture and identity through collage.

\*Workshop Fee \$25, materials included. Participants must be pre-registered, call (408) 998-2783 x 28. Limited space available.

**Gallery Hours:**

Wednesday & Thursday, 12pm to 7pm

Friday & Saturday, 12pm to 5pm

and by special appointment

Free Admission

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**About MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana**

MACLA is an inclusive contemporary arts space grounded in the Chicana/o experience that incubates new visual, literary and performance art in order to engage people in civic dialogue and community transformation. MACLA is located at 510 South First Street, San Jose, CA 95113. For more information about MACLA call (408) 998-ARTE or see [www.maclaarte.org](http://www.maclaarte.org)

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**Image credits:**

1. Tessie Barrera-Scharaga, *Coffee: The Malady of Third World Dreaming*, (detail), installation, 2011.

2. Samuel Rodriguez, *Fractions*, mixed media, 2012.