



**From The Studio**  
**ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE**

**(1997-1998)**

SHEILA BATISTE  
BRETT COOK-DIZNEY  
JULIO VALDEZ

OCTOBER 7, 1998 - FEBRUARY 28, 1999



## SHEILA BATISTE

Sheila Batiste has been exploring the notion of a universal human form through the silhouette since the early nineties. Her early attempts to work with the silhouette were traditional—dense, solid, monochromatic self-portraits drawn or painted directly on paper and wood. In an effort to make the form less autobiographical, Batiste began to conceal characteristics that related the figure to her directly, to emphasize the physical qualities associated with a general human form. The end result was a series of fluid line drawings that resemble wire armatures. Through her continued exploration of form, the silhouette has allowed Batiste to display fragments of stories that are inextricably linked to her own personal history, while connecting to a broader audience.

Batiste's painted silhouettes have a primordial simplicity that is merged with the gestural qualities of abstract expressionism. Interested in exploring the essence of man, the artist referred to the silhouetted form as the most basic, primal gesture. By establishing the essential contour of the figure, Batiste attempted to strip away everything that was external and capture the soul in visual form. The large graphically intense brush strokes, rich texture, and flat opaqueness of the silhouette work together to recollect early cave paintings.

As a way to further explore the body and bring her drawings into the third dimension, Batiste produces sculptural "wire drawings" by wrapping thinly coiled pieces of wire. The appearance of these figures recalls the work of Alberto Giacometti, a surrealist sculptor who worked and lived during the first half of this century. Although the artist does not reference his work directly, Batiste's "wire drawings" investigate the psychology of man—a tenet associated with the art of Giacometti and many post World War II artists. These pieces reflect the artist's interest in form and allows her the opportunity to explore the space inside of the silhouette that is usually concealed. It is as if she is excavating the human form.

Batiste's installation *what's gold about the gold in goldsboro*, has three distinct components that work to create a contemplative environment—wall treatments (paintings/drawings), sculptural forms (wire drawings), and an acetate book. The walls are covered with joss paper and large scale paintings that extend the full length of the wall. The use of joss is appropriated from a Chinese cultural tradition. Each sheet of

paper is painted with thin layers of paint that have the appearance of gold and silver leaf that flakes away when the paper is burned. This burning ritual is said to bring good fortune to those who participate or to someone in the afterlife. In addition, the reflective qualities of the gold and silver joss paper symbolically and formally stand for self-reflection. By using this joss paper Batiste says, "I am paying homage to where I am from and how my various environments have affected my entire life."

At the center of the installation, several "wire drawings" surround a transparent acetate book that tells the personal experiences of the artist's childhood in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Words including, "Sweet milk," "white sheets," "fish market," and "burning crosses" are written on individual pages and reference the golden and bitter sweet memories of a child's life in a small segregated southern American town. These words also appear on the walls of the installation.

In the early twentieth century, artists began investigating the possibilities of creating fine art through the use of the book format. Artists' books relied upon various genres, such as documentation, performance, installations, narratives, as points of departure. Batiste is influenced by this lineage of artists' books that challenges the notion of the linear narrative. In a more traditional sense, Batiste is interested in how books have hidden messages that are concealed and revealed at various places in a story.

As with her other books, *the power of the environment...* invites the viewer to participate in the work of art by flipping through the transparent pages that are collaged with text and drawings. A composite story can be deciphered when the transparent book is closed; however the narrative remains illegible because it lacks a linear story-line. Three bold letters, S, M, H, the initials of the Studio Museum in Harlem, are clearly written across the book's center. Each letter, on separate page, is accompanied by a stream of words related to Harlem and her experiences during her residency. Batiste sees *the power of the environment...* as a sort of manuscript that chronicles the life and conditions of the people in Harlem and reflects the views of youth and what they value. It is not a critique of the Harlem environment, but is rather a fragmented documentary of "the power of the environment to affect the life of humankind."





## BRETT COOK-DIZNEY

The human figure and formal art training lie at the core of Brett Cook-Dizney's work. His large-scale painted, mixed media constructions document members of select communities and are fueled by his personal history and political views. Essential to the success of his work is the notion of the narrative—both personal and collective.

A native of Southern California, Cook-Dizney is influenced by mural and graffiti traditions that contribute to his sense of community aesthetics. Attempting to fuse these two elements of public art, he merges the social ideology and preoccupation with painting of muralists with the technique and medium of graffiti artists. Because the artist employs spray enamel, a medium that is not traditionally accepted by academia, Cook-Dizney finds it important for his work to be grounded in techniques of fine art. The resulting body of work investigates individuals within specific social conditions and explores the concept of the community.

Central to his work is the notion of public/private, interior/exterior spaces. It is imperative to the artist that his work be accessible to diverse audiences—seniors, youth, art professionals, collectors etc. Conscious of the bureaucracy associated with institutional spaces, Cook-Dizney is passionate about art's relationship to diverse "non-art" communities and attempts to transcend those boundaries by displaying his work in spaces where people can have a fine art experience even if they are not a part of a museum audience.

Unlike an artist who uses acrylic or oil paints, Cook-Dizney is unable to mix enamel paints to create a desired hue. Instead he has had to master the relationships between different colors and create the illusion of depth and desired color. His paintings are executed with spray enamels, each gestural area of paint appears at a distance to be a brushstroke. What the viewer is actually seeing is one complete image composed of small monochromatic areas of color. His awareness of color is explicit and recalls the intensity and concentration of the European Impressionists of the nineteenth century.

California based artists, Richard Diebenkorn and David Parks are known for their ability to convey the energy and effervescence of sunlight. Cook-Dizney maintains that tradition as his attention to light resonates and makes his monumental figures glow with hope. The artist himself is clear on his influences. His artist statement says, "the formal considerations in my work often parallel particular modernist tropes. The German Expressionists, with their use of palette and their interest in class structure, Impressionism in their concern with light and precision, the Bay Area Figurative Movement in their use of surface, texture and stroke, and the phenomenon of Jean Michel Basquiat and his employment of urban visual language within the cultural elite."

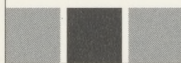
During his residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, Cook-Dizney's focus shifted to what he calls "the village of Harlem." He provided high school youth with cameras and a list of interview questions and asked them to take photographs of each other. He met and photographed the owners of a popular local family business that he frequents. To get a more diverse representation of Harlem, the artist conducted audio interviews with a group of seniors who live in a local nursing home. This research evolved into an intergenerational representation of the populations of Harlem titled, *Expressions of Harlem*.

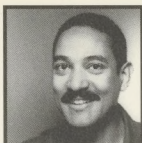
*Expressions of Harlem* can be described as a painted construction because of its sculptural qualities. His large scale painted portraits are done from photographs that he has taken and are executed on sheets of plywood. The picture plane has sculptural protrusions of various depths that extend from the primary surface of the composition. On small shelves that are dispersed throughout, ephemera that relates to each individual's portrait are placed on display—in the same way precious objects are showcased in museums. The shelves display an array of objects that include: photographs, completed questionnaires and menus.

Cook-Dizney's use of found objects places him in the context of a long history of artists. Marcel Duchamp, the father of Dada, an early twentieth-century movement that was comprised of art forms, ideas, and attitudes. Duchamp's redefining of preexisting non-art objects as fine art was revolutionary. Unlike the Dada artists, Cook-Dizney is among a host of contemporary artists such as Radcliffe Bailey, Pepon Osorio and Amalia Mesa-Bains, who use ephemera to capitalize on the emotional connections viewers may have to objects that are familiar to them. Cook-Dizney's post-modernist approach to his work, makes his constructions hybrid art forms that merge the found object with a highly classical approach to portraiture rendered with spray enamel.

*Expressions of Harlem* is a multiplicity of narratives that are complex compositions with many layers that function as single ideas. Excerpts from various interviews are woven through the installation. The artist integrates video, audio, drawings, photographs of his subjects and direct quotes from the interviews into a harmonious composition. Because the portraits are monumental in size, these smaller elements actually help to move the viewers' eye through the installation and create a visual balance.

Although each portrait can function as a solitary work of art, their formal execution coupled with the artist's fascinating use of color work together to create a cohesive composition that pays homage to a community of people. Because this piece is saturated with a non-linear narrative, the viewer can enter the piece at any place in the composition—there is no left or right, beginning or end.





## JULIO VALDEZ

Julio Valdez uses diverse materials to generate paintings and mixed media works that visually give form to memory and the human condition. By employing various painting, collage, and printmaking techniques, Valdez is able to develop a unique pictorial language that evolves out of a combination of his intuition, imagination, experiences, and memory. The artist studies the form and texture of objects that he finds visually appealing and uses them for the basis of a work of art. Many of these objects are stored away in his memory to be used as reoccurring motifs in future paintings.

Born in Santa Domingo, the Dominican Republic, Valdez relocated to the United States permanently in 1993 when he received a fellowship to work at the Bob Blackburn Printmaking Workshop in New York City. It was during this time that Valdez added his use of the silhouette, an important element in his current work, to his already existing visual vocabulary. Like Batiste, Valdez's use of the silhouette addresses issues of identity and self-reflection. In an interview the artist stated, "The silhouette became a point of synthesis in my work and then I began to use the self-portrait as a mode of self-reflection. The assimilation of all the different changes [in my life] triggered this self reflection." He projected light onto his body to create a shadow, which was then outlined on the canvas by the artist or an assistant. The use of his own physical form, however is a personal investigation of self and cultural history versus Batiste's attempt to reduce her individual presence in her search for a universal human form.

While in residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, Valdez has further explored his unique use of his body as a template for an ever evolving human presence. Currently, Valdez juxtaposes one silhouette on top of another to give the illusion of a figure in motion. The human presence is no longer static but in a place of transition, a place of constant motion and energy—it becomes an aura. The human form can once again reference the artists personal transitory state as a Dominican relocated and living in the United States.

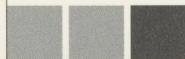
In spite of his continued residence in New York, Valdez consciously maintains his connection to Latin America through the use of cultural symbols, poetry and music that are indigenous to the Caribbean. He also incorporates other sources including, petroglyph images that are hulled from the caves of the Taino Indians, western Greco Roman mythology, his everyday surrounding

and his fine art background. Particular types of turtles and lizards of Latin mythology appear in his works, suggesting his retention of legends. Other Latin American artists using these motifs include Juan Sanchez who often investigates his parent culture using a contemporary visual vocabulary and his experiences as a Nuyorican as a back drop.

Valdez's dialectical approach to his work fuses his past with his present and allows him to use the canvas as a quilt, weaving the fabric of his experiences with elements of his cultural heritage. Many of his works pay homage to the quilt-making tradition where there is an investment in retaining sentimental objects to create a compilation that encapsulates memories. The patchwork of collaged drawings are patterned on the canvas like pieces of cloth and engages the viewer in a retrieval that touches on themes ranging from nature to cultural retention.

Valdez's *Te Regalo Una Rosa (I Give You A Rose)*, 1998 takes its title from a poem by the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda. In this piece, Valdez collages the entire canvas with joss paper. Relying on his incredible sense of color and skill, the artist sees the gold of the paper as a chance to make his canvases glow like illuminated manuscripts. He sees his layering of the canvas with this paper as way of preserving the memory of precious observations and or experiences. Fruits, plants, and animals which are evocative of ancient African and Central American culture are painted and drawn on each swatch of paper, making the individual squares and rectangles isolated chambers for memories. Many of the drawings synthesize elements from various objects and symbolic forms (such as fruits, plants and sculptures) to create his own unique visual language. He often uses the bleeding heart of Christ layered with a drawing of a strawberry to call attention to how close they are in appearance and to reconnect man with nature. He is not as interested in the actual religion as he is in the relics and symbols that define various belief systems. Another motif in his work is the Yuca plant which was the foremost crop in his home country and also is represented in Taino mythology by Yucahu, the god of creation and the yuca.

Julio Valdez is invested in the exploration of color, texture, and imagination. The work produced while in residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem demonstrates his development as an artist who can successfully merge his interest in abstraction with his unique reinterpretation of the human form.



**SHEILA BATISTE****EDUCATION**

- 1984 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Fellowship, Skowhegan, Maine  
M.F.A., University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC
- 1977 B.F.A., University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC

**SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

- 1997 *Spontaneous Movement*, Goldsboro Arts Council, Goldsboro, NC
- 1996 *New Projects*, Studio Batiste, Venice, CA
- 1995 *Prevailing Silhouette*, Zeneta Kertisz Art, Venice, CA
- 1993 *Primal Gesture*, Old Church Gallery, Venice, CA  
*Primal Gesture*, Matter, Venice, CA

**SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

- 1997 *Hand, Mind, Spirit*, Sheppard Art Gallery, University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada  
*Crosses, Crossroads, Crucifixes*, Gallery Lakaye, Los Angeles, CA
- 1996 *Maximum/Minimum*, Zeneta Kertisz Art, Venice, CA
- 1995 *Frequency 12.26*, Zeneta Kertisz Art, Venice, CA
- 1994 *LAX: California Afro-American Museum*, Los Angeles, CA  
*As We See It*, Watts Towers Arts Center Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1993 *Gallery Artist*, Patricia Correia Gallery, Venice, CA
- 1989 *Faculty Works*, Bronx River Community Art Center, Bronx, NY
- 1985 *Summer Group Show*, 50 West Gallery, New York, NY  
*North Carolina Afro-American Women*, Hickory Museum of Art, Hickory, NC
- 1984 *Art on Paper*, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro, NC  
*Figurative Works*, Greensboro Artists League Gallery, Greensboro, NC  
*Women Artists*, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro, NC
- 1982 *Drawing Exhibition*, Greensboro Artists League Gallery, Greensboro, NC

**SELECTED AWARDS**

- 1984 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Fellowship, Skowhegan, Maine  
Chancellors Purchase Award for Graduate Students, University of North Carolina - Greensboro
- 1980 Blue Ridge Fresco Project, St. Mary's Episcopal Church Apprenticeship, Glendale Springs, NC

**BRETT COOK-DIZNEY****EDUCATION**

- 1997 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine
- 1991 B.S., University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, California

**SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

- 1998 *Redefining The Perjorative: Is It Good or Bad*, Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art, Augusta, GA
- 1996 *See What I See*, (Public Work) Satalite Academy High School, New York, NY
- 1994 *Politically Correct?*, David Raymonds Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA
- 1993 *Automatic*, Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco, CA  
*Relative Concerns*, (Public Work) San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco, CA
- 1992 *Homelessness*, (Public Work) Yuerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA

**SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

- 1997 *Sunny Days Critical*, The Bohem Foundation, New York, NY
- 1996 *Two Person Spring Exhibition*, Thread Waxing Space, New York, NY
- 1995 *Made To Order: America's Most Wanted*, Alternative Museum, New York, NY  
*Modern Life*, Algira Center for the Arts and Project 5, Newark, NJ  
*City With Out Walls*, Newark, NJ  
*Old Glory, New Story: Flagging the 21st Century*, Santa Monica, CA

**SELECTED AWARDS**

- 1997 Camille Hanks Cosby Fellowship, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine
- 1996 ArtMatters Grant Recipient, New York, NY
- 1994 Best New Muralist Award, Precita Eyes Arts Center, San Francisco, CA
- 1993 Swig-Watkins Award, New Langton Arts,
- 1992 ArtMatters Grant Recipient, New York, NY

**JULIO VALDEZ****EDUCATION**

- 1988 Altos De Chavón School of Design, Santo Domingo, Dom. Rep.
- 1986 National School of Fine Arts, Santo Domingo, Dom. Rep.

**SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

- 1998 Toomey Tourell Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA
- 1997/98 *Transpositions*, Museo de las Americas, San Juan, Puerto Rico and Museum of Modern Art, Santo Domingo, Dom. Rep.
- 1995 *Cantos*, Voluntariado de las Casas Reales, Santo Domingo and Centro de la Cultura, Santiago, Dom. Rep.
- 1993 *La Era de Mita*, Galería San Juan Bautista, Casa Alcaldía, San Juan, Puerto Rico
- 1992 *Recent Works*, Galería Plástica Contemporánea, Guatemala, C.A.
- 1991 *Habitos del Tiempo*, Voluntariado de las Casas Reales, Dom. Rep.
- 1989 *Aire Fresco*, Instituto Dominano de Cultura Hispanica, Dom. Rep.

**SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

- 1998 IV International Biennial of Painting, Cuenca, Ecuador
- 1998 XII Latin American and Caribbean Print Biennial, San Juan, Puerto Rico
- 1997 *V Drawing Biennial*, Fundacion de Arte Arawak, Museum of Modern Art, Dom. Rep.
- 1996 *Art in Transit: A Dominican Experience*, Part Two, Intar Latin American Gallery, New York, NY
- 1995 *Shades of the Spirits: Contemporary Explorations in Printmaking and Drawing*, The Painted Bride Art Center, Philadelphia, PA
- 1994 *Artists in the Marketplace (AIM)*, The Bronx Museum for the Arts, Bronx, NY  
*Robert Blackburn, Inspiration and Innovation in American Printmaking*, Wilmer Jennings Gallery at Kenkeleba House, New York, NY
- 1992 *XVII National Visual Arts Biennial*, Museum of Modern Art, Dom. Rep.

**SELECTED AWARDS**

- 1996 First Prize, Printmaking, XX National Visual Arts Biennial, Museum of Modern Art, Dom. Rep.  
Visiting Artist Fellowship, Brandywine Workshop, Center for the Visual Arts, Philadelphia, PA
- 1994 Fellowship, Bob Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop, New York, NY
- 1994 First Prize, Printmaking, XIX National Visual Arts Biennial, Museum of Modern Art, Santo Domingo, Dom. Rep.
- 1992 Second Prize, Printmaking, XVII National Visual Arts Biennial, Museum of Modern Art, Dom. Rep.

# AIR 1997-98 CHECKLIST

## SHEILA BATISTE

**what's gold about the gold in goldsboro**  
mixed media installation  
joss paper, wire, wood, acrylic, acetate  
dimensions variable,  
1998

**what i see can't see what i know i don't know...#1**  
mixed media on vellum  
24" x 36",  
1998

**what i see can't see what i know i don't know...#2**  
mixed media on vellum  
24" x 36",  
1998

**what i see can't see what i know i don't know...#3**  
mixed media on vellum  
24" x 36",  
1998

**what i see can't see what i know i don't know...#4**  
mixed media on vellum  
24" x 36",  
1998

**what i see can't see what i know i don't know...#5**  
mixed media on vellum  
24" x 36",  
1998

**the power of the environment...**  
acetate, gold, silver, black ink, markers  
40" x 25",  
1998

## BRETT COOK-DIZNEY

**Expressions of Harlem**  
spray enamel, acrylic, charcoal, photographs,  
graphite, shoe polish, personal writings, audio  
and video, on wood and plexiglass  
dimensions variable,  
1998

## JULIO VALDEZ

**Te Regalo Una Rosa (I Give You A Rose)**  
acrylic, collage and pigment on canvas  
72" x 76",  
1998

**Self Portrait With Roots**  
acrylic, and pigment dispersion on canvas and paper  
72" x 78",  
1998

**Caged Birds (When innocence is gone,  
where can we go?)**  
acrylic, collage and pigment dispersion on canvas  
109.5" x 56",  
1998

**Self Portrait At The End Of The Century**  
acrylic and pigment dispersion on canvas  
90" x 76",  
1998

**Circle of Hope**  
Installation, wood, pigments, dirt, candles  
dimensions variable,  
1998

**...como el que sabe su destino...**  
(...like the one who knows his destiny...)  
mixed media on paper  
40" x 60",  
1998

The Artists-in-Residence program and exhibition are sponsored in part by funds from the Heathcote Foundation, The New York Community Trust, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, Seagram's Gin, New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts Operation of the Museum is supported in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

FRONT COVER:  
(LEFT) SHEILA BATISTE, detail from *what's gold about the gold in goldsboro*, mixed media installation  
(CENTER) BRETT-COOK DIZNEY, detail from *Expressions of Harlem* installation  
(RIGHT) JULIO VALDEZ, *Te Regalo Una Rosa (I Give You a Rose)*, acrylic, collage and pigment on canvas

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: Becket Logan  
DESIGN: Rebecca Lown Design