

contemporaryartsmuseum houston

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 22, 2010

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Siege tower on the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's front lawn part of new work by San Antonio artist Cruz Ortiz

Perspectives 170: Cruz Ortiz
Opening reception: May 6, 2010, 6:30-9pm
Gallery walk-through and performance by the artist at 6:30pm

On view: May 7 through July 11, 2010



Cruz Ortiz, *You Say You Do Pero I Know You Don't*, 2009.
Watercolor and gouache on paper. 24 x 18 inches. Courtesy
the artist and David Shelton Gallery, San Antonio.

Houston, TX—San Antonio artist Cruz Ortiz believes he may have missed his calling. “I should’ve been a honky-tonk singer,” he says. But because he can’t croon like a conjunto or country music star, Ortiz more than compensates by deploying a broad range of media—prints, paintings, sculptures, video, installation, and performance—to speak about life, love, and the struggle for equality. In *Perspectives 170: Cruz Ortiz*, the artist’s first in-depth museum exhibition and catalogue, the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston will present a selection of works from these categories.

To help him navigate the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Ortiz has created an alter ego: the Spaztek, a post-Chicano, post-punk antihero. Part Aztek, part spazz, and part spaceman (think of Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods?* and the sci-fi premise that the ancient Mesoamericans communed with aliens), the Spaztek is a holy fool and a noble savage who throws himself into a Quixotic quest for romance and self-realization. Among the humorous, oftentimes rattletrap devices Ortiz uses to enable the Spaztek to express human yearnings for companionship and communal action are "balladic broadsides, transient architecture, life-size flying contraptions, megaphones, pushcarts, rockets, maps, banners and flags, siege machines."

On the CAMH's front lawn, Ortiz will construct a siege tower, a mobile structure used for scaling castle walls. This tower, like many of the artist's constructions, will be repurposed from military to peacetime uses. It will become a multifunctional platform from which the artist may distribute silkscreen posters, music, or broadcasts from a low-power radio station. Recalling the decorated, information-disseminating agitprop trains used in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution to enlighten the population with "agitation" and "propaganda," the siege tower will be an important center for the Spaztek's campaign to spread understanding and good will. The CAMH's downstairs Zilkha Gallery will feature a tent city inspired by Ortiz's students at the San Antonio high school where he teaches art, many of whom grew up in similar improvised shelters in refugee camps in Africa. It also will contain posters and other works relating to the siege tower and other projects.

Houstonians should keep an eye out for works by Ortiz throughout the city. Each of Ortiz's museum or gallery exhibitions has been accompanied by campaigns dispersed throughout the community, often in the form of posters advertising sweet, imaginary things like dreams of love or free snow cones.

Like all true revolutionaries, whether of the heart or the battlefield, the Spaztek, Ortiz says, "needs to jump in." "He has passion, so he doesn't see the consequences; he's aware that he might be facing a dead end, but he has no regrets." For the artist, this character and his countless mini-narratives of "cheesy love and heartbreak" parallel the stories of all those who may have been let down by the American dream but persist in its pursuit. Perhaps because Ortiz works as a high school teacher and is continually in contact with idealistic young people, his art is driven by a passion that is both personal and political. Like Keats, Byron, and Shelley, the capital "R" Romantic poets of the early 19th century, the Spaztek is an inspiration to wear your heart on your sleeve and dive headlong into the struggle for a better, purer world.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Houston in 1972, Ortiz received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a concentration in printmaking from The University of Texas at San Antonio. Group exhibitions include *Phantom Sightings*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA, and *Coyote girl steals the raspa*, Ev+a, Limerick, Ireland. Ortiz has had solo shows at Artpace San Antonio, San Antonio Museum of Art, and Dallas Center for Contemporary Art, TX. Ortiz lives in San Antonio, where he also teaches high school.

PUBLICATION

Perspectives 170: Cruz Ortiz is organized by Toby Kamps, senior curator for the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and will be accompanied by a *Perspectives*-format catalogue with an essay by Kamps, reproductions of exhibited work, and the artist's biography.

Perspectives catalogues are made possible by a grant from The Brown Foundation, Inc.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

The *Perspectives* Series is made possible by major grants from Fayez Sarofim; The Studio, the young professionals group of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; and by donors to the Museum's *Perspectives* Fund: Anonymous, Anonymous Fund at the Community Foundation of Abilene, Bright Star Productions Inc., Heidi and David Gerger, Leslie and Mark Hull, Anne and David Kirkland, Karol Kreymer and Robert J. Card,

M.D., Kerry Inman and Denby Auble, Belinda Phelps and Randy Howard, Lauren Rottet, Leslie and Shannon Sasser in Honor of Lynn Herbert, Sara Dodd-Spickelmier and Keith Spickelmier, William F. Stern, 20K Group, LLC , and Laura and Rob Walls.

EDUCATION SUPPORT

The Museum receives support for its education programs from: Anonymous, Baker Botts L.L.P., Baker Hughes Foundation, Ruth Dreessen, Louise D. Jamail, Mr. and Mrs. I.H. Kempner III, Kinder Morgan Foundation, M.D. Anderson Foundation, Marian and Speros Martel Foundation Endowment, Nordstrom, Inc., and 20K Group, LLC.

Teen Council is supported by Baker Hughes Foundation and Baker Botts L.L.P.

GENERAL SUPPORT

The Museum's operations and programs are made possible through the generosity of the Museum's trustees, patrons, members and donors. The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston receives partial operating support from the Houston Endowment, Inc., the City of Houston through the Houston Museum District Association, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

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CAMH MISSION

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is an idea and a place shaped by the present moment. The Museum exemplifies the dynamic relationship between contemporary art and contemporary society through its exhibitions, public and educational programs, and publications. The CAMH provides the physical and intellectual framework essential to the presentation, interpretation, and advancement of contemporary art; it is a vibrant forum for artists and all audiences, and for critical, scholarly, and public discourse.

ALWAYS FRESH, ALWAYS FREE

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, at the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet, in the heart of Houston's Museum District. Hours are Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm, Thursdays to 9pm, and Sundays noon to 5pm. Admission is always free. For more information, visit www.camh.org or call (713) 284-8250.