



iArte Caliente!

SELECTIONS FROM THE JOE A. DIAZ COLLECTION

RUBEN CORDOVA: Could you tell us about your background? Where were you born and raised? Were you exposed to art as a child? Did your parents collect art?

JOE DIAZ: I was born in Karnes City, in South Texas and raised in San Angelo, in West Texas, where I graduated from Angelo State University. I was interested in art from an early age—I even begged my mother to allow me to have oil painting lessons from a teacher that mainly taught adults. They got a kick out of seeing me—a young boy—taking lessons with a bunch of women in their 50's and 60's. I also took art classes all through jr. high and high school. Those experiences deeply affected me. It upsets me that kids don't have the opportunity to take the daily art classes that I was so fortunate to have. My mother always collected things. She currently collects religious Mexican art.

RC: How, when, and where did you begin to acquire art? What were your initial acquisitions, and why did you make them?

JD: I began acquiring work in the late 80's when I was living in Houston. My first purchase was a plate from a series that Benito Huerta was doing on the Last Supper. I think that I paid \$600 for it. The gallery had a second plate and I bought it for \$540 because they gave me a 10% "collector's discount." The reason I bought these pieces was that I loved the Sacred Heart in the first plate, and I liked the way that he incorporated the barbed wire in the piece. Both of the plates were more works of sculpture than craft. Then I began going to museums and acquiring books to learn more about art. The first book I bought was called *Fresh Paint*. I was impressed with artists such as Derek Boshier (Kelly Allison) and Chuck Dugan. I loved the colors and the bold strokes that each used in their paintings. The first painting I bought was by (Kelly Allison) After going to the gallery and seeing her show, I went home and begged my wife to allow me to get one. She was always supportive, and said she would also like to see the painting. At the time, I thought that when you gave the gallery owner the money, you could take the painting off the wall and take it home. I mentioned to Bill Graham, the owner of the Graham Gallery, how much I loved the show's signature piece, and how I wished that I could afford it. To my surprise, he told me that he wanted me to have it. He said he would deliver the work after the show closed, and that I could pay for it over time. I was on cloud nine.

RC: How do you distinguish a "collector" from a decorator or an accumulator? How would you define your own collecting activities at this juncture?

JD: I personally think that the word "collector" is used too frequently in connection with people who have acquired just a few pieces. To me, a "collector" is someone who has acquired a substantial body of art that has synergy and symbolic resonance: pieces that work together and play off of each other. People that I consider to be "collectors" are Mrs. de Menil who acquired masterworks of Surrealism, Pop and Minimalism in depth. I also think the term applies to Gilbert Denman, whose collection of Greek and Roman sculpture and Egyptian art is unbelievable. I guess that I would put myself in the "accumulator" category. I have acquired hundreds of pieces, but I recognize areas where my collection falls short. I hope to fill those holes in the next ten to fifteen years. It takes time. I also don't knock anyone who has bought work for use as decoration. Once they do that, the collecting bug will bite them, and they will acquire more. They just have to realize what they get for the money they paid. The buyer—if he or she makes a good choice—gets something much more valuable than the money spent. It is imperative that they learn from outside sources, such as gallery owners, artists, and books, in order to facilitate educated choices.

RC: Did anyone play an important advisory role in the formation of your collection?

JD: Two people had a highly influential role when I lived in Houston. They taught me about art and also helped me make some excellent decisions when I began acquiring work. One is the artist Benito Huerta, who is now a professor at UT Arlington. He eventually introduced me to Luis Jiménez, César Martínez, Kathy Vargas and John Hernández.

The Houston gallery owner Bill Graham also helped me. I spent so much time with these two guys, asking questions and just listening to them talk about art. I soaked up as much as I possibly could. I also studied books constantly. A very influential book to me was *Hispanic Art in the United States*. That was the first time that I saw César and Luis's work—I was just blown away. I thought it was the hottest work that I had ever seen. During my time in Houston, I saw a lot of work. My days were spent working, my lunches were spent studying art at the Contemporary Art Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, or the Menil Collection. I also spent a lot of time in the galleries.

RC: Why have you collected more Chicano art than anything else? Do you believe that you have a "Chicano aesthetic" or a "Texas aesthetic" that somehow reflects—or was fundamentally informed—by your experiences in South Texas?



iArte Galiente!

SELECTIONS FROM THE JOE A. DIAZ COLLECTION

Exhibition Checklist

all dimensions are listed by Height, Width, and Depth

1. Alison, Kelly. *What's A Mother To Do?* 1988.
Oil on canvas. 52" x 82".
2. Arismendi, Connie. *El arbol de Mi Vida*
(The Tree of My Life). 2000.
Mixed media (wax, steel, stone, birdseed). 9'H x 6'Diam.
3. Bettison, James. *Self Portrait in Texas (In Tux)*. 1988.
Mixed media collage on rag board. 13" x 11".
4. Brown, Roger. *Pie in the Sky*.
Acrylic on canvas. 24" x 24".
5. Brudniak, Steve. *The Dentures of Michael Ostott*. 1986.
Mixed media and electricity. 26" x 11" x 15".
6. Carter, Keith. *White Bird*. 1992.
Toned Gelatin Silver print 26/50. 15" x 15".