

Spinning San Antonio:

Latina/o Resistance to Cultural Erasure in the Heart of San Antonio

by Roberta Hurtado



Photo: Joan Frederick

Recalling the Catholic tradition of placing statues of saints upside down when asking for a favor, Briseño's request is very simple: re-narrate the Alamo's stories to include those written out of its history and destabilize the anti-Latina/o discourses for which the Alamo has become a signifier.

When the Daughters of the Republic appear to be offering an “olive branch” to Tejanos, two questions come up: the first, why? And second, do you take it? For local Chicano artist Rolando Briseño, the answer to these questions can be seen as originating on June 13, 2010 with the premier of his “Flippin’ San Alamo Fiesta,” or as early as the arrival of Spaniards/Mexicans in 1691 and the subsequent building of the Alamo as a shrine to the city’s namesake. Although rarely discussed by tour guides as they lead thousands through what has become a master symbol of U.S. Anglo Euro-centric capitalist patriarchal hegemony, the Alamo’s history begins before the defeat of U.S. troops in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, the trail of blood begins long before that in a different form of colonization, and thus Briseño’s answers are centuries in the making.

So what better way for a visual artist to respond than through a cultural performance set in the very center of a contested colonial site? The annual event, now approaching its third reincarnation as “Spinning San Antonio,” represents Briseño’s attempt to re-member the lost voices of those who live beneath the Alamo’s shadow and remythologize the Alamo’s cultural symbolism—but on his own terms. And given the San Antonio Convention and Visitor’s Bureau’s launching of merchandise proclaiming “Remember the...” in direct reference to the infamous battle-cry currently documented in high school textbooks throughout the nation—Remember the Alamo!—this remythifying cannot come too soon.

“Flippin’ San Alamo Fiesta,” the first incarnation of Briseño’s vision, was set against a backdrop of anti-ethnic studies fervor rampaging across Arizona in combination with anti-immigration legislation that sought to eradicate Latinas/os as anything other than “enemies” from national narratives. In 2011, “Flippin San Antonio” pressed for continued support of Chicana/o activists in their resistance to cultural genocide here in Texas. This year’s event, however, seeks more: to set the stage for a new consciousness.

The event itself is a visual amalgamation of re-visioned signifiers. Taking place on Saint Anthony’s Feast Day, June 13th, Briseño’s cultural performance begins with a procession in reminiscence of a fiesta patronal. A little discussed (but important) fact about the Alamo: its original use was as a shrine to Saint Anthony, and it held religious celebrations during the first decades of its existence. And who participated in these “celebrations”? Spanish colonizers, the forced Amerindian laborers, and the mestizos born from unions between Amerindians, enslaved Africans, and Spaniards. Taking up this reality, Briseño’s statue of St. Anthony is carried by four actors in front of the Alamo. These actors, dressed as an undocumented Mexican prisoner, a Pachuco, an African-American enslaved person representing the reintroduction of slavery to San Antonio following the U.S. colonization of Texas, and an illegal Anglo immigrant complete with a coonskin cap, place the statue on a table of reconciliation

in front of the Alamo and a ceremonial flip of the statue. Why flip the statue? Recalling the Catholic tradition of placing statues of saints upside down when asking for a favor, Briseño's request is very simple: re-narrate the Alamo's stories to include those written out of its history and destabilize the anti-Latina/o discourses for which the Alamo has become a signifier.

Briseño seeks to burst open the long held secrets that the Alamo has hidden within its walls. In this vein, a ceremonial Native American blessing kicks off the event to cleanse the space and recognize the indigenous ancestors whose bodies are buried beneath the structure and whose lives were lost in its creation and maintenance. Simultaneously, a parade of low-rider clubs, including local groups the Pushrods and O.G. Traditions, circle the Alamo, reminiscent of Comanche charges on the mission.

Following this cleansing ceremony, musicians Los Nahuatlitos and Bianca Sapet serenade the statue with songs honoring mestizaje and afro-mestizaje culture. As the event concludes, an Alamo shaped piñata is sacrificed to the crowd of spectators and explodes with a waterfall of multiethnic babydolls. The visual statement? That we must acknowledge all the persons of color who have been secreted away behind narratives of Davy Crockett, Anglo resistance to the "dictator" Santa Ana, and the importance of "freedom" for those who fought against "Mexico." Once the



Photo: Joan Frederick

Alamo has spilled its secrets, the actors are able to place the statue right-side up on the table of reconciliation and remove it from the Alamo. This year, Briseño intends to lay an olive branch of his own in front of the Alamo for the DRT but with a personalized message: only when organizations, whose foundations have been the denigration of others' existences, learn to acknowledge the violence of oppression and head the voices of those demanding

Spinning San Antonio

June 13, 2012

6:30pm in front of
Alamo Plaza

8:45pm Reception @
Museo Alameda

social justice can peace exist.

As June 13th draws near, organizers and supporters eagerly await the opportunity to lay their olive branches in front of the Alamo. Join us for this event Wednesday June 13th at 6:30 p.m. in front of Alamo Plaza that will begin with a blessing by Ameyaltonal Tejaztlan. A reception donated by Mr. Jorge Cortez of Mi

Tierra Restaurants follows at the Museo Alameda at 8:45 p.m.

This year, Briseño intends to lay an olive branch of his own in front of the Alamo for the DRT but with a personalized message: only when organizations, whose foundations have been the denigration of others' existences, learn to acknowledge the violence of oppression and head the voices of those demanding social justice can peace exist.

This year we give special thanks to sponsors Dr. Rafael Guerra and Sandra Castro Guerra, Dr. Raul Yordan and Norma Bodevin, and Dr. Antonia Castañeda and Dr. Arturo Madrid whose continued generosity over the last three years has once more made this possible. Indeed, the support of San Antonio's local community to keep this event going evinces a heart-felt dedication to transforming the Alamo into a place where we can all reflect and contemplate the confluence of our many cultures. Briseño and coordinator Roberta Hurtado look forward to seeing you there this year. Together we can help spin San Antonio one more time!

Bio: Roberta is now working on her dissertation, entitled "The Flesh of Empire: Psycholocal Enfleshment in Puerto Rican Women's Literature," at The University of Texas-San Antonio. Her main focus is Puerto Rican women's literature and third space feminisms theory with a specialization on colonial and neoimperial studies. She is a BritoRican originally from Massachusetts but has lived New York and San Antonio. This is her third year organizing Spinning San Antonio with Rolando Briseño.