

ARTISTS EMERGE

THEIR SUBJECTS SHOW
WIDE RANGE, BUT CREATORS
BEHIND S.J. EXHIBIT HAVE
A FEW THINGS IN COMMON



Contrasts mark Alejandro Oliva's "Casa Amarilla."

Bustin' Out

Where: Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana, 510 S. First St., San Jose

Where: Exhibit runs through March 5; gallery hours: Wednesday-Thursday 12-7 p.m., Friday-Saturday 12-5 p.m.

Tickets: Free

Contact: (408) 998-2783 or www.maclaarte.org



"Babvdoll." by Abraham Ortega. uses soray paint and

By **Nerissa Pacio**
Mercury News

A hulking Mexican showgirl. Armpit wax. A graffiti-tagged wall. A skeleton.

They are not obvious representations of beauty. But these diverse works, created by four young San Jose artists, play with aesthetic conventions in the new exhibit "Bustin' Out," at the Movimiento de Cultura y Arte Latino Americana (MACLA).

The four up-and-coming artists — Mitsy Ávila Ovalles, Angelica Muro, Alejandro Oliva and Abraham Ortega — have a few commonalities. All are 30 or younger; all are of Mexican descent.

But the mixed-media installation, ranging from photography and collage to painting and video, portrays subjects as varied as the artists themselves as it defines what is beauty.

Part of MACLA's mission is to showcase emerging artists. Anjee Helstrup, MACLA curator, says she chose this particular group for the wide range of its artistic training and dedication to its work — not based on academic degrees.

"A lot of time these so-called 'emerging artist shows' follow a certain formula," Helstrup says, explaining they are "recent MFA grads, usually from the area art schools. But emerging artists should be from everywhere... I felt there was a certain energy, maturity and connection between all of these artists' work."

Drawing upon her upbringing in a Mexican-American household in East San Jose, Ávila Ovalles pays homage to childhood pop culture anti-heroes

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— exotic dancer and Mexican film starlet Lyn May and flamboyant pop singer Juan "Juan-ga" Gabriel — in her oil and acrylic portraits.

"I've always been immersed in my mom's world of Spanish TV," says Ávila Ovalles, 26, who recently graduated from San Jose State University. "It was usually on the news or gossip shows. I wanted to pay tribute to these people who aren't really respected but are actually genius."

Ávila Ovalles also explores the beauty and mystery of thrift store castaways in her layered bric-a-brac collages.

"These pieces are raw and relate to body image," she says. "For example, I might use beauty ads layered in the collages. It's safe there... It lives between the layers of the background."

Muro, a graduate art student at Mills College, uses self-portraiture with a pop culture twist to explore society's obsession with beauty.

In the digitally manipulated photograph, "Make-Me-Pret-

ty," Muro superimposes an image of her own face onto a life-size Barbie styling head. In another photo, titled "Armpit wax... \$25" she enlarges a piece of depilatory wax embedded with armpit hair. Another element of her exhibit includes video clips from the 2004 Miss USA pageant played in slow motion.

"I've always been overwhelmed by the homogenization of beauty," says Muro, 30. "There are these unrealistic expectations of what one is supposed to look like. I'm fascinated by mass consumerism, reality TV and the way everyone looks so perfect."

Ortega, 30, a tattoo artist at Lucky Stars parlor in San Jose, says he "keeps things simple" in his enamel paintings of two of his favorite subjects — cars and women.

"There are no real heavy meanings," says Ortega, whose nascent body of work is characterized by bold colors and black outlining similar to his tattoo art. "They are beautiful. Like eye candy."

Ortega's work does, however, incorporate elements from Mexican culture. In "Babydoll,"

he reappropriates a '40s-style "tattoo flash," or tattoo design, using a Chicana as the female image. He found inspiration for "Sirena," a painting of a topless mermaid, in drawings on old Mexican bingo or (*lotería*) cards.

Rounding out the group show is the vivid photography of Oliva, 22, a junior at De Anza College. Using digitally manipulated 35mm prints, Oliva aims to capture beauty in the mundane.

In one striking photograph, black graffiti mar a red and yellow wall on a building in Mexico.

"There are these beautiful colors," Oliva says. "The photo is well composed. And yet the window is dark. And then you see writing — like the wall is screaming for help."

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Mitsy Ávila Ovalles, who grew up in East San Jose, shows two worlds juxtaposed in her mixed media work "Sundial."



JIM GENSEHEIMER — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

The digital photograph "Las Flores," left, by Alejandro Oliva, and the mixed-media work "Yo No Fui" by Mitsy Ávila Ovalles, are part of MACLA's "Bustin' Out" exhibit.