

Expanding the Scope of ‘Latin American Art’

Eight not-to-be-missed shows offer scores of creators and local art traditions from New York, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, Mexico and South America.

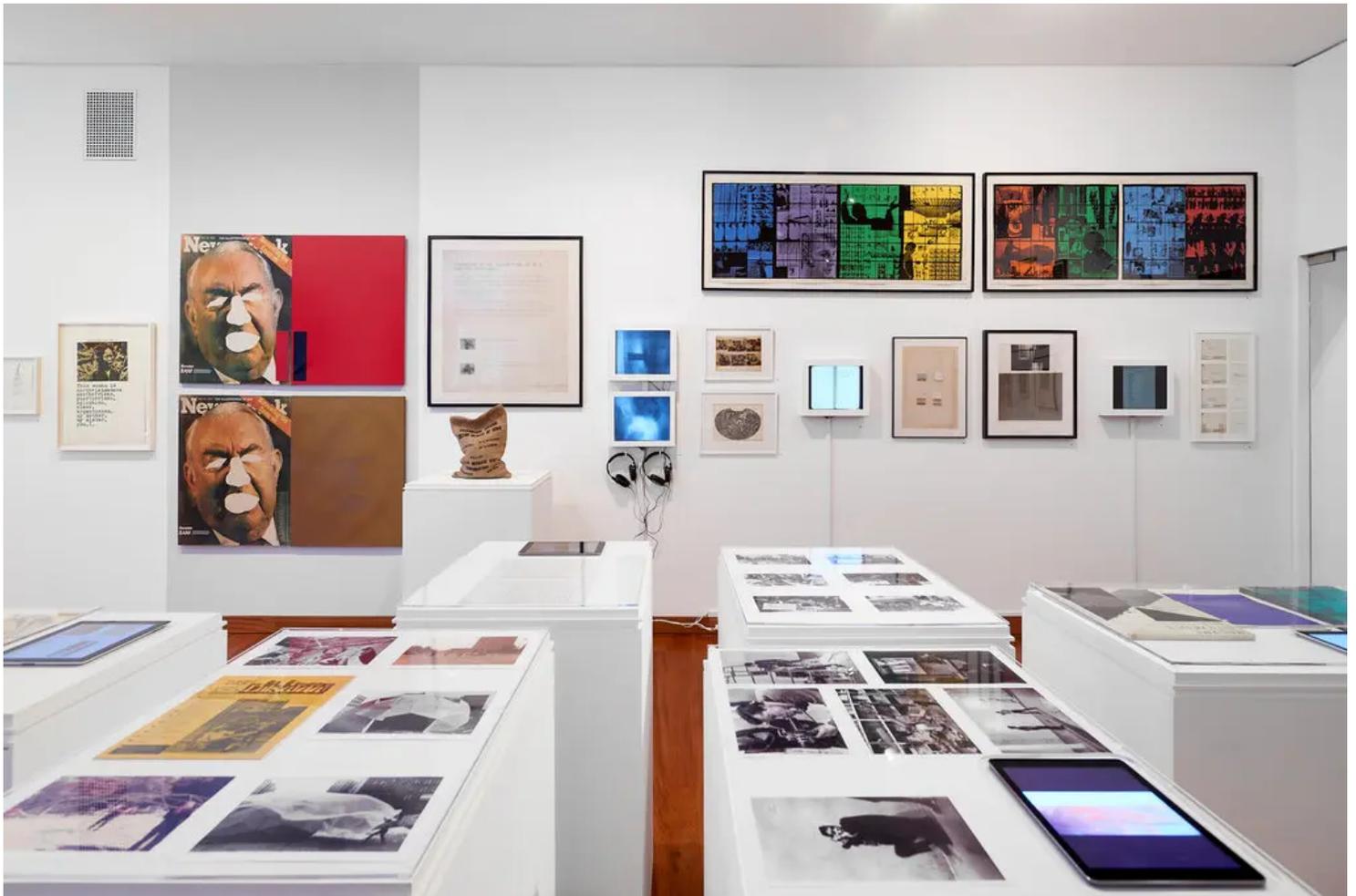


By Holland Cotter

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You don’t need to know anything about art to be stopped in your tracks by what’s on the walls of El Museo del Barrio these days: the fantastic ballpoint pen drawings by Consuelo (Chelo) González Amézcuea (1903-1975), a Mexican immigrant to Texas; the stupefyingly intricate collages of Felipe Jesus Consalvos, who was born in Havana and died in Philadelphia, where in 1983 his life’s work was found in a garage sale; and the pictographic paintings of Puerto Rican-born Eloy Blanco (1933-1984), who came to New York City to study art and learned from fellow Latinos about the Indigenous Taino culture of his homeland — a culture he ended up making the wellspring of his work.

This season has brought a bounty of historical shows of Latin American and Latino art, two cultural categories that are closely related without being interchangeable. Latin American is generally understood to designate art originating in the southern hemisphere of the Americas. Latino (with its Latina and Latinx cognates) refers to work by artists of Latin American descent working in the United States. But both terms are spacious and mutable.



View of “This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York, 1965-1975” at Americas Society. Arturo Sánchez

Americas Society

Dimas's name gets a mention in an ambitious group exhibition called "This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York, 1965-1975" at Americas Society.

The narrative here is of artists from South and Central America coming to New York City, a newly hot international cultural center, some to explore career opportunities, others to escape political repression. Most didn't think of themselves on arrival particularly as "Latin American," never mind "Latino." And while the show acknowledges the longtime presence of Latino artists in the city, there seems to have little interchange between them and the newcomers.

Race and class played a role in this, and differing senses of investment in the city. To Latino artists it was both home and battleground. To Latin American transplants it was a stage where a politics of aesthetics was playing out in new avant-garde styles and forms: Minimalism, Conceptualism, video and performance. And what extraordinary artists the experiments brought to New York: temporarily, Hélio Oiticica from Brazil, Marta Minujín from Argentina, Zilia Sánchez Dominguez from Cuba; permanently, Luis Camnitzer from Uruguay, Juan Downey from Chile, Freddy Rodríguez from the Dominican Republic.

They are among some 40 artists and collectives in the show, organized by the Americas Society curator Aimé Iglesias Lukin, with Mariana Fernández, Tie Jojima and Natalia Viera Salgado — which comes in two parts, one through this Saturday, Dec. 18, the other, with different work by the same artists, opening Jan. 22.