

“La Bienal 2013: Here Is Where We Jump”

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

1230 Fifth Avenue

June 12–January 4

To follow the subtle spatial logic of El Museo del Barrio’s current exhibition, the seventh edition of a biennial formerly known as “The (S) Files,” one begins with a bombastic gold-leaf portrait of Ol’ Dirty Bastard, a founding member of the Wu-Tang Clan, and ends with an impressive pile of paint chips. Alex Nuñez’s *ODB*, 2012, creates a playful tension between fine art and popular culture, Byzantine icons and hip-hop bravura. For Pavel Acosta’s *Wallscape*, 2013, the artist stripped the paint from a wall in the museum’s permanent-collection galleries, then meticulously rearranged the refuse to create a mirror image of Manuel Macarulla’s *Goat Song #5: Tumult on George Washington Avenue*, 1988, about the United States’ meddling in the troubled politics of the Dominican Republic.

Like Nuñez’s piece, Acosta’s white-on-neutral drywall collage fools around in the space between lionhearted tribute and astringent critique. *Wallscape* builds on an earlier series that Acosta made from piles of paint chips stolen over time from the streets of Havana. It also enacts what the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish called “the unspoken gratitude between opposites that dualism inspires,” which, were it not for the title “Here Is Where We Jump” taken from the tale of a boaster in *Aesop’s Fables*, could have been the show’s unifying theme.

Doubles, opposites, and duals run throughout the exhibition, usefully complicating the discourse of the biennial and of the museum itself on issues of identity, authenticity, exoticism, exile, migration, and ever-more malleable geography. As viewers, we are repeatedly encouraged to look twice—not only by New York City’s friendliest museum guards, who speak of the art here from a place of real passion, but also by the works themselves, from Sean Paul Gallegos’s *Ethnoportrait*, 2013, a feathered headdress made from sneakers and shirt collars, to Ignacio González-Lang’s haunting *Khinatown*, 2011, a uniform tailored specifically for a Ku Klux Klan security guard and later embroidered by illegal immigrants, who stitched in some of their own ideas, including CULTURAL RELICS ARE IRRETRIEVABLE, PLEASE BE CAREFUL WHEN VIEWING THEM.



Sean Paul Gallegos, *Ethnoportrait*, 2013, Air Jordan sneakers, thread, arrow collars, fur, laces, 21 x 13 x 19".

— Kaelen Wilson-Goldie