ABOUT THE ARTIST

Bolívar Arellano was born in Ibarra, Ecuador on September 3, 1954. He began his photography career in Buenaventura, Colombia in 1983 freelancing for nine different newspapers. Three years later, Arellano moved to Guayaquil, Ecuador and worked for El Telégrafo and Volunteer magazine. In both 1988 and 1992, he was the recipient of Best Annual News Photo awards.

After arriving in New York City in 1971, Arellano continued to work as a photographer for The Associated Press and El Tiempo. In 1974, he started contributing photographs to El Diario La Prensa and Nicholas Del Mundo. A year later, Arellano became a freelancer for The New York Post and in 1983 he joined the staff retiring in 2004.

As a photographer for the Associated Press, Arellano covered El Salvador's Civil War and the Sandinista Revolution in the 1980s. He was kidnapped by the Contras in Nicaragua, and held captive for several days. On September 11, 2001, while on assignment, Arellano survived the fall of the first tower and was wounded after the fall of the second. Despite his injuries, Arellano continued to work and over 100 of those photographs for their collection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Curating at Gallery at the Center is always a labor of love, and I am deeply grateful for everyone’s indispensable contributions. Starting with the home front, I am very thankful for the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race staff, Teresa Agustín and Josephine Caputo, and students Irene Wang, Luis Figueroa and Samuel Robison, who were involved in multiple aspects of the show with great intelligence, enthusiasm and humor. I would also like to thank Columbia’s Director of Communications Victoria Berrizbeitia for her critical role in the acquisition of El Diario La Prensa’s archive and journalist David González, whose thoughtful New York Times article on Bolívar Arellano led me to focus on his art.

In addition, I would like to recognize Javier Gómez and Ángel Vélez, who worked tirelessly and voraciously in all aspects of El Diario La Prensa’s extensive digital archives. I am particularly grateful to my colleague Michael Ryan, editor of Columbia’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library, whose support for the project was critical. I also want to extend my gratitude to the entire staff of Deans’ Studio for their generous help in the preparation of the exhibition. My thanks also to the staff at Columbia University Libraries, especially to Catherine Blakey, Ira Nash and Stuart Phillips for their invaluable support and dedication to the project. For their generosity in allowing me to work in your space, I am deeply grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge the generosity of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, which provided support to the exhibition. The museum’s curatorial staff, led by Director Lisa Gigante, was instrumental in making this exhibition possible. I am very grateful to them, and to the entire staff of the museum, for their support and dedication to the project.

Catalogue

Bolívar Arellano in Brooklyn, 1971-2004

Foreword by a Young Lord, 1980

Juan José Bors and Angela Oya at ‘Golden Day’ / ‘El Día Dorado’, 1984

The Puerto in El Barrio, 1974

Reading a Poem in the Lower East Side, 1975

Cuba in El Diario, 1977

Jesús Rafael Vargas, 1974

Catalocked by Studio 957-1977

The Ragging 70s: Latino New York As Seen by El Diario’s Bolívar Arellano

The Ragging 70s: Latino New York As Seen by El Diario’s Bolívar Arellano

GALLERY AT THE CENTER

CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED

OPENING AND PRESS VIEWING

October 5 - November 12, 2011

Leonardell Avenue at 122nd Street

Gallery Hours: 11am - 6pm, Monday - Friday

Private opening, October 5, 2011

Museums opening receptions are fun and they are for all ages. It’s a great opportunity to network and get to know people in the arts. There are so many people who are involved in the arts whether it be on a large scale or a small scale. It’s a great opportunity to get involved and be a part of something special.

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LATINO NEW YORK

written by dr. oliver boliviar arelano

frances negron-manturin

director/curator

Well before Time magazine declared that the 1980s would be "the decade of the Hispanic" and before the 2000 census revealed that Latinos were the nation's largest minority, New York was already a Latino cultural and political awakening. In the context of major debates about immigration and urban decay, the long 1970s—from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s—saw a flourishing of artistic talent and the emergence of new forms of political organization. The city itself became a magnet for artists and politicians from the rest of the country and Latin America who saw New York as an important political and cultural stage. Neither New York nor Latinos would ever be the same.

To revisit this period's impact, The Raging '70s features twenty black and white images of public figures, significant events and everyday life through the lens of one of the era's most talented photographers, Boliviar Arelano. Born in Ecuador in 1944, Arelano learned the craft of photography as a teenager while living in New York. In 1986, he returned to Ecuador and started working for El Tiempo newspaper and Vistazo magazine. Five years later, Arelano escaped to New York City after receiving death threats from the Ecuadorian military for his investigation into the murder of a student at the hands of an officer. In New York, he continued to work as a journalist, documenting the only Latino photographer at The Associated Press. In 1974, he started freelancing for El Diablo La Prensa, the nation's oldest Spanish-language newspaper.

The photographs shown here are part of El Diablo La Prensa's exhibit on Contemporary Latino Photography, which was recently donated to the Latino Arts and Activism Project, a project of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University.

The collection includes the work of over ten photographers and spans from the 1970s to the present.

Of the literally thousands of possibilities, we chose twenty of Arelano's images for a few good reasons. The most immediate is their striking ability to position the spectator inside the picture, transforming the act of viewing into a fully sensorial and participatory experience. The quality of Arelano's prints is in sharp contrast to the major collections of Latinos in mainstream publications during this period. In addition, age, identity, and politics, prominent photographers like Dan Melcher tended to shoot Latinos from a distance, often highlighting the poverty of their subjects and their surroundings. Fitly, Arelano's images, "look closer" and place Latinos at the center of the frame, and in this manner resonates a critique of these practices and invites viewers to see New York Latino as rich and complex in its own terms.

In looking across this, Arelano's photographs also offer an indispensable counter-memory of the 1970s. If in many contemporary popular accounts, the 1970s are New York's darkest moment, Arelano shows both the era's turmoil—bloodied heads and mass arrests included—as well as its verve and joy. This may be particularly evident in his photos featuring figures of the Nuyorican Renaissance A sweeping Puerto Rican cultural-political movement the Renaissance created a new public identity for a historically disregarded community along with an innova- tive literature, music, and visual culture. Equally important, the movement founded alternative institutions such as El Museo del Barrio, Lalo Boricua and Nuyorican Poets Call that brought hope and pride to neighborhoods and offered alternative ways to think about artistic production and reception. Whereas Arelano does not capture all challenges faced by Latino communities, his chosen emphasis does the image of Latinos as victims and visualization how people and transformed these circumstances through new forms of community and ways of being in the world. A fascinating example of Arelano's extraordinary photographic voice of writers Miguel Pérez and Sandra Maria Esteves riding the B train past with a Puerto Rican joy is, to say the least, fruitfully unsettling. Of all the Nuyorican writers of this period, Pérez is among the most famous, and his fame is closely tied to his portrayal as a white collar deviant driven by his own demons. In this photo, however, we see a

playful Pérez enjoying the city as part of a community. Pérez's laughter both defies how New York Latino was (and arguably still is) represented and underscores that the love that many felt for their city at this time was not in spite of, but because of, its volatile mix of pride and prejudice, brutality and beauty. As Pérez's moving captures in his signature "Low East Side Poems":

there's no other place for me to be
there's no other place to sit that I can save
there's no other love around that
brings you up or keeps you down
cross your tomb is my home

Arelano's emphasis in public figures is then not about celebrity, but rather Latino photographers such as the Mexican American Jesus Manuel Maria Garcia or the Nuyorican Toni Vasquez, who acted as contemporary emissaries of a changing United States. Arelano is particularly interested in making visible the role of Latinos in the pivotal transformation. A case in point is Arelano's photographs of Latino music stars. Although dominant narratives of Latino music stars, the 1970s continue to tell largely Latinoless accounts of race and achingly high, the oddest presence of Ruben Blades, Celia Cruz and Willie Colon

clearly accords that Latino New York produced one of the most compelling sounds of the century-salsa. Arelano's selection of stars—immigrants from Panama, exile Cuban, and colonized minorities from Puerto Rico—further underscores that while salsa was spoken as mostly a localized barrio phenomenon, this sound was the product of a transnational mix slowly cooked to perfection in New York and concurrently exported. Not surprisingly, Arelano also zooms in on the political impact of Latinos during the 1970s. While in the decades following World War II, the city's establish- lishment perceived Latinos as politically passive and many among the Latino middle class tried their best to pass, the 1970s' daily rise in Latino New Yorkers, which was so often seen winning—key battles against discrimination in housing, and for senior housing and for the rights and care expanded the democratic rights of all Americans.

Moreover, the 70s produced new multiracial alliances, bringing together African Americans and Latinos to contest colonialism, racism, and gentrification. Likewise, as the unusual photograph featuring Dominican politician José Peña Gómez Ortiz's 1973 visit to New York evokes, Latino politics in the city became constitutionally transnational, ushering a differ- ent way of thinking about immigration, citizenship and belonging across the Americas. If before the 1970s many dream of their return home as the only solution to the hardships of immigrant life, after the 70s, immigrants built multiracial homes everywhere they went.

Ultimately, Arelano's photographs continue to compel because they are radically prophetic. It is hard not to see the image of children demonstrating demanding immigration reform an anticipation of today's "Dreamers." Seen is impossible not to connect the Nuyorican Renaissance and the salsa explosion with the return of the old and contradic- tions of contemporary Latino creativity, caught between the demands of bilingu- lity and the demands of the cultural marketplace. At the end, the ragging 70s remains because we are still standing on its founda- tion, a political project by its boundless imagination.

Roben Blades at Studio 54 (1975)
C-print, 20 X 30 in.