

YO MISMA FUI MI RUTA **(I WAS MY OWN ROUTE)**



FEATURING

BETSY Z. CASAÑAS
DEBORAH CAIOLA
MICHELLE ANGELA ORTIZ
RUTH NAOMI FLOYD

Above: "Echo" by Deborah Caiola

OCTOBER 3 - DECEMBER 18, 2009

ABOUT THE EXHIBIT



I have now had the great pleasure of 'living' with what was but a few weeks ago a collection of seemingly disparate paintings, prints, and photographs, that is now a family of images, wedded by the intent of the artists and their mastery of the mediums.

As the show has taken shape, Leeway's office has become a treasure trove of visual surprises, and I find I linger in certain places or look forward to turning a corner to catch a glimpse of the work.

Perhaps it's Michelle Ortiz' *La Madre, La Hija y El Espiritu Buscando*, her triptych of three generations of strong women in her family; or Deborah Caiola's playful and compelling portrait *Fruit of the Womb*; or Betsy Casañas' bold self-portrait *La Pelea del Gallo* which compels your attention with its passion; or Ruth Naomi Floyd's *Life After Darkness*, one of her series of veiled women that has much to teach us about the ways of darkness and light. We are all of us, who work here, honored in the presence of the work, these acts of love that are the expressions of four very distinct voices.

By way of introduction to this, our first public exhibit, I would like to share with you a message I sent to the artists as we were preparing for the show:

...We've decided to call the show *Yo Misma Fui Mi Ruta (I Was My Own Route)*, it's the title of a poem by Julia de Burgos, a Puerto-Rican artist and activist (and, yes, the name of a school in Philly).

I think as a title it speaks to the similarities in your intent and the different ways you make it manifest. Taking this path to art and change can challenge everything we've been taught, eh? When she says, "...I wanted to be like men wanted me to be: an attempt at life; a game of hide and seek with my being."

I think it's about that. About how sometimes the choices we make can challenge everything we've been taught. Can even challenge what it is we think we 'want' for our selves... our lives... our communities. That really grabbed my attention, not just intellectually but viscerally. How many times have I personally found myself in that place?

This work of art and change requires a commitment not only to the work, but the exploration of self in the context of the work—the letting go of what we reject, and the way we embrace what's truth in our visions.

You are each, very definitely, your 'own routes.'

Take good care, Denise

Many thanks to Maori Karmael Holmes, Evelyn Salcedo, and Sean Stoops for paying attention to the details, of which there were many.

And to these four amazing artists, I offer my eternal gratitude for their generosity and for trusting us with their hearts.

Denise M. Brown, Curator
September 2009

Please note: The works in this exhibition are for sale with all proceeds going directly to the artists. A price list is available upon request.

YO MISMA FUI MI RUTA

Yo quise ser como los hombres quisieron que yo fuese:
un intento de vida;
un juego al escondite con mi ser.
Pero yo estaba hecha de presentes,
y mis pies planos sobre la tierra promisoro
no resistían caminar hacia atrás,
y seguían adelante, adelante,
burlando las cenizas para alcanzar el beso
de los senderos nuevos.

A cada paso adelantado en mi ruta hacia el frente
rasgaba mis espaldas el aleteo desesperado
de los troncos viejos.

Pero la rama estaba desprendida para siempre,
y a cada nuevo azote la mirada mía
se separaba más y más y más de los lejanos
horizontes aprendidos:
y mi rostro iba tomando la espresión que le venía de adentro,
la expresión definida que asomaba un sentimiento
de liberación íntima;
un sentimiento que surgía
del equilibrio sostenido entre mi vida
y la verdad del beso de los senderos nuevos.

Ya definido mi rumbo en el presente,
me sentí brote de todos los suelos de la tierra,
de los suelos sin historia,
de los suelos sin porvenir,
del suelo siempre suelo sin orillas
de todos los hombres y de todas las épocas.

Y fui toda en mí como fue en mí la vida...

Yo quiese ser como los hombres quisieron que yo fuese:
un intento de vida;
un juego al escondite con mi ser.
Pero yo estaba hecha de presentes;
cuando ya los heraldos me anunciaban
en el regio desfile de los troncos viejos,
se me torció el deseo de seguir a los hombres,
y el homenaje se quedó esperándome.

I WAS MY OWN ROUTE

*I wanted to be like men wanted me to be:
an attempt at life;
a game of hide and seek with my being.
But I was made of nows,
and my feet level on the promissory earth
would not accept walking backwards
and went forward, forward,
mocking the ashes to reach the kiss
of new paths.*

*At each advancing step on my route forward
my back was ripped by the desperate flapping wings
of the old guard.*

*But the branch was unpinned forever,
and at each new whiplash my look
separated more and more and more from the distant
familiar horizons;
and my face took the expansion that came from within,
the defined expression that hinted at a feeling
of intimate liberation;
a feeling that surged
from the balance between my life
and the truth of the kiss of the new paths.*

*Already my course now set in the present,
I felt myself a blossom of all the soils of the earth,
of the soils without history,
of the soils without a future,
of the soil always soil without edges
of all the men and all the epochs.*

And I was all in me as was life in me...

*I wanted to be like men wanted me to be:
an attempt at life;
a game of hide and seek with my being.
But I was made of nows;
when the heralds announced me
at the regal parade of the old guard,
the desire to follow men warped in me,
and the homage was left waiting for me.*

THE ARTISTS

BETSY Z. CASAÑAS

2008 Leeway Transformation Award

Betsy Casañas is a mother, artist and educator who was born and raised in the heart of 'The Badlands' of North Philadelphia's barrio. She studied art at Moore College of Art and Design where she received her B.F.A. Betsy has assisted and designed over 35 public murals and mosaics nationally and internationally (Larne, Ireland; Havana, Cuba; Morelia, Mexico; Quito and Santo Domingo, Ecuador). Presently, she is an exhibiting artist, a muralist for the Philadelphia Mural Arts, and the 10th grade mural design, drawing and painting teacher at The Charter High School for Architecture and Design.

In 2007, along with visual artist Pedro Ospina, Betsy founded the Semilla Arts Initiative, a grassroots organization that uses art as a catalyst for social change and collaboration as a means of empowering individuals and communities through the use of art. She continues to live in the North Philadelphia neighborhood where she grew up, with her children Archangel (14 years old) and Kristianni (9 years old).

My career as an artist was blossoming beautifully but everything else around me that I believed to be secure was crumbling. Being hurt disappointed, shattered and exposed were necessary to a process that would eventually lead to clarity and acceptance. Less emphasis was on refining the color, line and on the finished state of the drawing in fact it was on the position of a hand, expression, distortion and on things missing which represented a false sense of security. I was alone again!

Collage became a very significant aspect in my work combining images of the past with ones from the present. The layers of paper hiding and exposing what was necessary was like an intricate visual replica of how we as individuals live. How we change, learn and grow depending on who walks through your life. My work at this time was about exploring a life in transition and learning what was in constant change.

The pieces in the last works were of visual and written compositions that combine my stories with those who are most interwoven into the threads of my life. These paintings touch on themes of abuse, abandonment, fatherless children, vulnerability, love, sex and family. My work uses portraits and entries gathered from journal text, songs, conversations and memories to show multiple perspectives with different interpretations. The voices conversing, conflicting, clashing, rejecting, eliminating and revealing a hidden or obvious truth.

The work demonstrates that one's life is nothing more than a combination of other lives; the product of braided stories, ideas, and experiences that become vessels capable of acting, enlightening and influencing. Using myself as a common thread for all of these relationships and through their stories, we can reflect, develop and transform.

My philosophy when it comes to life, love, and family, living and teaching is nothing profound. It is simple and pure in its simplicity. As we evolve, transform, rebuild and get tossed back down again, we learn how to love freely without expectations, without judgment, and without fear.

DEBORAH CAIOLA

2008 Art and Change Grant; 2004 Window of Opportunity Grant; 2001 Window of Opportunity Grant

Deborah Caiola was raised in Washington, D.C. and received a B.A. in anthropology from Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame. She had an early career as a social worker and then earned a certificate in painting from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She has been an adjunct faculty member at Villanova University for seven years where she continues to teach painting and drawing. She has been exhibiting her work in Philadelphia since 1998 and more recently in New York. Deborah lives in Philadelphia with her partner and her six-year-old daughter.

My education in cultural anthropology and painting, my early career in social work, and my relationship to my very large and very close family, inform both my portraiture and my paintings of birds. I make representational, narrative paintings that utilize surreal and symbolic imagery. I arrange my portraits and 'bird paintings' intuitively, aiming to communicate ideas about personal and social concerns so that they resonate intrinsically rather than intellectually.

In the past five years I have completed two interview-based portrait projects. These works are focused on biographical storytelling and the anthropological study of particular segments within our society. Portrait of a Generation, an exhibition in painting and sound, celebrates the lives of 11 American women of the 'silent generation', born between 1933 and 1943. Portraits in Emotion, a project I curated and for which I made paintings, is an investigation using painting and text into the experiences of 12 adult artists whose lives have been touched by mental illness. I am currently working on another portrait project which examines faith and feminism.

Another recent body of work is a series of narrative paintings utilizing images of birds to tell stories about social, mythological, and spiritual themes of my life. Birds connote a lofty overview, an aerial perspective. I use the bird image as a universal figure, a generic subject, familiar and ordinary, yet mysterious and inspiring, onto which I can impose concerns of our day.

I hope my paintings convey the sense of joy and awe that I experience while painting in my studio.

MICHELLE ANGELA ORTIZ

2008 Leeway Transformation Award; 2005 Art and Change Grant

Michelle Angela Ortiz is a visual artist who seeks to capture lost legacies, personal stories and silenced voices in her work. Through painting and printmaking, she explores the common threads that exist among her family and community. She is influenced by her Latin American and Caribbean cultures and these issues of identity evolve in her work. As a first generation born American, Michelle believes that she is a part of a large and ever-changing community.

Michelle holds a B.F.A. from Moore College of Art and Design and a M.S. in Arts and Cultural Management from Rosemont College. She has worked with various nonprofit organizations in developing and facilitating community arts programs for young people and adults in a variety of settings.

As a highly skilled muralist, she has designed and created over 30 large-scale public works nationally (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Mississippi, New York) and internationally (Ecuador and Costa Rica). In 2008, she was selected by the United States Embassy to Fiji as the only American artist to create a permanent mural and host professional workshops to skilled artists in the community during Fiji's International Festival of the Arts.

In addition to her work in the community, she maintains her commitment to her own studio practice. She has exhibited her paintings and prints in numerous galleries and museums such as: Delaware Art Museum, George Washington Carver Center, The Painted Bride, Ice Box Gallery, Penn State HUB Gallery and the Goldey Paley Gallery. She has work in permanent and private collections abroad such as the Rohm and Haas Company, Galeria Tonatzin (San Juan Bautista, CA) and Xicanoindio Gallery (Mesa, AZ).

Michelle is also an active member of Las Gallas, a Philadelphia-based multi-disciplinary arts collective that gathers to share stories, inspire dialogue and debate about ideas of family, traditions, religion, education, and gender roles. Through workshops and creative investigations, Las Gallas creates collaborative performances and installation work that incorporates its members' skills in theatre, visual arts, dance, film, poetry, spoken word, and literature. Las Gallas' newest work will be featured at Taller Puertorriqueño as part of the 2010 Philagrafika quadrennial international print festival.

As a visual artist I am affected by what I see, how I see is always shifting due to my environment, beliefs and life experiences. Painting is the foundation of my artistic practice combined with elements of print-making, drawing and writing.

My work displays interactions and encounters with myself, those that came before me and those that have contributed to taking me to another level. Those interactions emerge from conversations with a fellow artist, opinions from an inner-city teenager, a vivid dream that my grandmother tells me or even patterns that remind me of my childhood.

As I have worked with various communities I have realized that they are reflections of my family. They all carry with them a lifetime of stories and believe that their realities are unimportant and have no value.

My intention is to continually define and redefine who my community is. I absorb stories, I see myself in others, I search for their truth, I make connections, I document and create what I know, what moves me and what inspires me in all of these encounters. I display these experiences through my artwork, not just to tell a story, but to record, document, and present my/ our truth.

Please note: Michelle will be participating in a U.S. Embassy-sponsored residency in Chihuahua, Mexico from September 28 to October 12. As a result she will not be present during POST. She will be present for her Artist Talk scheduled for Friday, November 13.

RUTH NAOMI FLOYD

2006 Leeway Transformation Award; 1996 Honorable Mention, Leeway Award (Visual Arts)

Ruth Naomi Floyd was born and raised in Philadelphia. She received an A.A. in photography from the Art Institute of Philadelphia and specializes in black and white portrait images. Ruth is fascinated by the human face and finds joy in creating portraits that are etched in her mind and soul. She uses silver-based films with 35mm and 4" x 5" view cameras to capture her images. Ruth uses traditional wet darkroom technology as well as digital printing on archival papers to produce her final images.

She has completed and exhibited two photographic series, *Passage Through the Soul* and *Reflection: Woman and the Veil*. Ruth lectures and conducts workshops and seminars on topics that explore faith and the arts. Ruth has received awards, prizes and grants for her photographic images and her work is included in permanent and private collections. Her photographic images have been published in and on the covers of magazines, brochures and music compact discs.

Ruth is currently represented by White Stone Gallery, 4219 Main Street in the northwest Philadelphia neighborhood of Manayunk. For more info call (215) 482-7700.

I am fascinated by the human face and find joy in creating portraits. I choose the medium of black and white photography because it allows me to express the brightest white to the deepest black and the vivid gray shades that fall in between. My photographs reveal images that are already deeply etched in my mind and soul.

In the language of silence and stillness we are led to places where we may discover the stirring of mystery and the calm of peace. Throughout that journey one encounters many challenges: the pull of memory, the struggle to balance communion with others and with oneself in the space of vulnerability. My art trusts in the hope of discovery.

My goal is for my images to evoke a response, whether positive or negative. I humbly accept the process of creating art as a gift from God. These images are the product of that gift. Art is essential to human life and its spirit; art can speak to the human condition, and strengthen and revolutionize thoughts and lives. When that happens, the art is the message and the artist is merely the messenger.

PROGRAMS



Above: "Here" by Ruth Naomi Floyd

ARTIST TALKS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2009
2:00pm to 4:00pm
Betsy Z. Casañas & Deborah Caiola

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2009
5:30pm to 7:30pm
Michelle Angela Ortiz & Ruth Naomi Floyd



Above: "Alegria" by Michelle Angela Ortiz.

SPECIAL EVENTS

PHILADELPHIA OPEN STUDIO TOURS (POST)
October 3-4, 2009

The Philadelphia Building
1315 Walnut Street, Suite 832
Meet the artists from 12:00pm-6:00pm

4TH ANNUAL CHANGEMAKERS CABARET
October 6, 2009

Ibrahim Theater @ International House

CLOSING RECEPTION & WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION
Thursday December 17, 2009 - 4:00pm-8:00pm
Details to come.

ABOUT LEEWAY

Support for individual artists is at the core of Leeway's mission. The Foundation serves as an important resource for women and transgender artists who often struggle to find funding for their work, and it hopes to grow the way its resources can support social change through supporting art and culture.

Our grant programs, the **Art and Change Grant** and the **Leeway Transformation Award**, are open to women and transgender artists living in the Philadelphia region working in any medium of art, including traditional and non-traditional as well as multimedia and experimental forms. Creating change must be integral to the ideas, beliefs, and goals that are woven throughout the work and the process of creating and sharing the work. The Art and Change Grant, offered three times per year, provides up to \$2,500 to fund art for social change projects and opportunities. The Leeway Transformation Award, offered annually, provides \$15,000 to honor artists who have demonstrated a commitment to creating art for social change for five years or more.

For more information please visit our website, leeway.org, or call (215) 545-4078.