

The Decade Show.

Frameworks of Identity in the 1980's

The New Museum of Contemporary Art, The New Museum of Contemporary  
Hispanic Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem.

Catalina Parra

Julia Hertzberg

Exhibition Catalog, pg 47

Similar to other artists in the exhibition, Chilean –born Catalina Parra is concerned with the social and political aspects of the human condition. Her protesting voice claims art as vehicle for social change. At one time or another the issues in her art were frontline news items. They include economic dislocation and inequality, urban decay, homelessness, AIDS, overcrowded jails, social alienation, wars, military intervention, and nuclear power.

Working with everyday recognizable materials and topical subjects, Parra reassembles images and texts from commonly found printed matter: newspapers, magazines, photographs, and so forth. Parra's mixed-media works on paper are also formed out of bits and pieces of found materials from the home, street, and marketplace- to the flotsam and jetsam she stitches, ties, cuts, adds, discards, pastes, wraps, drapes, bunches and tears. The choice of images, their sources, the eventual combination reveals a highly selective process. The issues raised and the messages conveyed are those the viewer uncovers and discovers through the juxtaposition of disparate images and texts, filtered through the artist's vision and further manipulated in the process of assemblage. The finished works are intended to bring the public's attention to a myriad of unsolved social and /or political problems. Having met the challenge of identifying the issue for the viewer, Parra further leads the viewer to consider the causes of the problem.

Parra avoids explicit imagery, for she feels it is less effective in accomplishing her aims. She feels that everyday events tends to lose their impact through the process of visual bombardment by the media that causes people to become visually and audible immune to the problems at hand. Therefore Parra sees the need for an artistic language to find subtle ways to combat growing inured to the sociopolitical developments by challenging the viewer to read between the lines, to find the metaphor, to make the associations between the image and text. Without identifying the problem there can be no investigation of it; without an investigation , no solution. The key to change rests with the viewer.