

ON THE SCENE

Collective exhibit emerges from vaults of former bank building

BY CAROLINE MACKINNON
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Javier Areán's work is staying underground.

The Mexican artist's haunting figurative paintings, along with the work of six other young artists recently traded a catacomb-like cellar in London for a musty corner of the basement vault in a seven-decade-old Mexico City bank.

Called "Emerging from the Shadow," (*Emergiendo de la Sombra*) the exhibit originally took place in February beneath an English town hall and has had somewhat of a homecoming in this equally odd exhibition space.

The capital's downtown area is a wealth of majestic buildings that are being converted into sites for all types of cultural happenings.

The Fundación Centro Histórico has been one of the main proponents of this phenomenon, a project that tycoon Carlos Slim undertook to help revitalize the charming yet rundown city center.

The alternative gallery and venue, Pasagüero, works closely with the Fundación and has helped to turn this recently abandoned former Nacional Financiera into a venue to hold everything from art exhibits to fashion show events.

At the opening party late last Thursday night, Slim, the richest man in Latin America, graced the show with his presence, parting the crowd of dancing young people around midnight so he could check out the artwork.

One of the organizers, Jon Bonfiglio, said that the exhibition features the same seven artists as the London show earlier this year, but because the Mexico City building is so different, and some of the artists have added new work, it has a very new feel.

"There are two very different vibes going on at the same time," Bonfiglio said, referring to the basement, a maze of strongboxes and safes where the visitor can hunt for everything from paintings to video installations.

Two oil paintings of stark blurred nudes — one male,

EXHIBIT INFO

Emerging from the shadow (*Emergiendo de la sombra*) will be at the Nacional Financiera on Venustiano Carranza 25 in Mexico City's Historic Center until Nov. 5. Free admission.

one female — are fixed to the ends of long, mirror-capped hallways and make up Mexico City-native Areán's piece, "Exiles."

"The search for places to show my work has almost become as important as the creation of the piece itself," the artist said.

One sees just the reflections of the lonely-looking figures down the corridor before seeing the actual paintings.

Many of the pieces, especially those in the basement, seem to have been created with this specific site in mind.

Paulina del Paso's collaborated with Isabel Muñoz to create a sound installation in one of the dimly-lit claustrophobic cement hallways. One hears the sounds of gunshots and screams, presumably from a robbery, maybe in a bank.

PLAYING WITH IDENTITY

Upstairs, Miho Hagino's "La cama de las dos Alicias" (The bed for two Alices) is a resting spot for her quirky deformed plush dolls. Hagino, who moved to Mexico from her native Japan over 10 years ago, creates pieces that touch on what it's like to be treated like an outsider in a country she has made her home.

Scottish artist, Katri Walker, also confronts living in a place where she is looked at differently, especially by men.

She presents two video pieces called "State of the he/eart." Dressed in a spangled mariachi-style outfit and sombrero, Walker sings a broken-hearted serenade to her ex-boyfriend, a ranchera woman conflicted, "living in this macho country, being independent and traveling on my own, but at the same time having this more sort of vulnerable side that I still want a big strong man to look after

A plush doll from Miho Hagino's "La cama de las dos Alicias."



Fernando Aceves' untitled painting, oil on canvas.



RENE ROZAINZ/EL UNIVERSAL

SOPHISTICATED SPACE: The Nacional Financiera has been abandoned for more than 10 years.

me," she said.

Artist Gabriela León comments on the fashion and beauty industry with her "BeautyWorld" project. She makes soap sculptures and clothing pieces from the tissue remnants of people who ments for these products and objects like a soap sculpture made from liposuction fat or a leather skirt made from strips of tummy tuck skin.

She says that part of what she's interested in exhibiting

is not the object itself, but the advertising for it, always making people wonder whether the object really exists or not.

Fionn Petch, another of the exhibit's organizers, said he put León's "BeautyWorld" logo in the catalogue's list of this cross-cultural exhibit will be in a crypt in London in February and will travel to Glasgow before Mexico City.

Walker will curate the show, the theme of which will be "Betrayal."