



Frederick Chiriboga is a long-time Richmond artist and resident and an interesting and provocative painter and sculptor. Born in the mountains of Nevada, Chiriboga lived in Ecuador and Colombia before returning to the U.S. to attend Wayne State University in Detroit. He has exhibited extensively, for several years ran the **Aguiles Adler Gallery** on Broad Street with his wife **Birte Christensen**, and has recently had his work featured in the HBO film **Iron Jawed Angels**, about the women's suffrage movement in America.

Chiriboga's sharpest memories of life in South America are of the times spent at his grandfather's farm in the Andean mountains of Ecuador, where the land was still being tilled with oxen and wheat was harvested by hand. He spent time with the carpenters and at the forge, at the cobbler's shop acquired his love for leather-work, and, as Chiriboga puts it, "many hours (not always voluntarily) in colonial Catholic churches where Mass was said in Latin in memorable spectacles full of guilt and thick incense smoke." He enjoys the work of the early Surrealists, Goya, Velasquez and Raphael, and often, he says, his own.

Chiriboga's paintings seem rich psychic tableaux that don't easily leave the mind. They look as if they could be "stills" or outtakes from the 1973 French film **The Fantastic Planet**—the animated, surrealistic vision-apocalyptic nightmare of a futuristic dystopia where people lead mechanized, dehumanized lives, replete with 'moving roads' and long-legged, Bosch-inspired birds (and some species of rapacious, razor-toothed "Blue Meanies" giving chase). The point being that both would seem to delight and horrify in appealing with their morbid curiosity, latent consciousness, and hypnotic charms. Chiriboga's work has a strong sense of ascendance and transcendence to it as well—of floating (or fleeing), infinitely in time—like the dreamy liberation and sensuousness that comes with free-falling or an exodus. And much in the Spanish tradition, many of Chiriboga's paintings have a sort of picaresque landscape of the mind and **Don Quixotean** expansiveness and wanderlust to them. Doubtless, Chiriboga's painting and tone owe much to the works of such masters as Miró, Dalí, O'Keeffe, Vermeer, Magritte, Ernst and others, but they are also strongly influenced and informed by his unique culture and experience, his mythology and personal philosophy. There is similarity (if not wholly in styles) in the way Chiriboga marries paradoxical or antithetical feelings of glee and menace, serenity or isolation with an oppressive or palpable presence (even perversity) much in the manner and spirit of a Balthus, Brueghel or Bacon painting. In the end, the works are both weird and wonderful.

His bravura sculpture, with its savagely mordant rhetoric and wit, creative "unconvention," and a sometimes unusual and jarring juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous objects, is much in the vein of Robert Rauschenberg—with both artists elevating truculence and naturalism to the sardonically strange and gently piquant and sublime.

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Surrealist Symbolism, Tribal 'Totems' at art6

After a very successful fall re-opening and first Members' Exhibition (approximately 1,200 in attendance at the First Friday opening), art6 continues its exciting new season with **Totemic Magic**, an October offering by painter and sculptor **Frederick Chiriboga** and sculptor and jewelry artist **Suzanna Biro**. Oct. 1-31, with a First Friday opening reception Oct. 1, 7-10pm.

The following abstract is excerpted from **Cause for Celebración**, my review of the monumental exhibition **Celebración de las Artes Latinas**, curated by **Henrietta Near**, which took place at Artspace at 6 East Broad in 2003, in which Chiriboga had a number of paintings and sculpture. Near also served as **art6** liaison for the current exhibition of **Totemic Magic**. The entire review may be found on the web at www.artZites.com:

"All of Chiriboga's pieces are deserving of contemplation and special attention. In particular, Chiriboga's painting entitled **My Inheritance** would seem to embody and encompass the themes and spirit of his other three works in the exhibition. The work portrays a winged man (who apparently is Chiriboga himself as well as Everyman) standing upon a crucifix dripping with blood, ascending and floating above what seem to be paper-bag bundles (a thinly-veiled reference and stereotype for drug and "blood money," the corruption and general malfeasance associated with many Latin American regimes). In front of some primordially fertile and generic green land with his Christ-like nimbus surrounding his countenance, Chiriboga seems almost self-deifying—absolving and anointing, availing himself of his final and only means of informed resolve and self-reliance. Chiriboga writes: "This painting is not necessarily a reference to my personal finances or family history, but more to the inheritance Latin people in general have received from their colorful and sometimes bloody Catholic culture and from a history that at times feels rich mostly with corruption and abuse. Sometimes the only escape is to fly away and bring along the only inheritance that really matters: what you've learned. . . ." And with an artist as singularly scathing and yet somehow gentle as Federico Chiriboga, we invariably do bring along what we've learned." [In 2005 Chiriboga's art will be shown at the **Southwest School of Art and Craft** in San Antonio.]

In the 'sixties sculptor and jewelry artist **Suzanna Biro** traveled and lived in Colombia, South America, with Colombian artist **Fernando Luiz Salamea**. They apprenticed in small villages throughout the country, learning weaving, pottery and painting. In Bogotá she studied with artists **Luis Ortega** and **Jorge Zalamea**. Upon returning to the States, she studied sculpture and drawing with **Raphael** and **Moses Soyer** at the Grant Street Settlement House in lower Manhattan and at the YMCA Art Studies Program in upper NYC. In the 'seventies Biro left Manhattan and moved to rural upstate New York where she began to experiment with mixed-media sculpture. Wood, beads, string, natural materials, and found objects became her raw materials. Her work was shown and purchased from small galleries in Woodstock and the lower East Side of Manhattan. From 1983 to 1998 Biro collaborated with Greek furniture designer **Yiannis Diamadopoulos**, creating unique functional art pieces, painting each with an original image and often with her own phrases, poems, or stories. Their work was exhibited in upstate New York, rural Connecticut, Boston, and later in Asheville, North Carolina. In 1988 the two had an exhibition in Athens, Greece. In 1999 Biro returned to her mixed-media sculptures and added skulls and bones of small animals. Archetypal themes began to emerge. In addition to her October 2004 exhibition at **art6**, the new work is also being shown at the Seven Sisters Art Gallery in Black Mountain, North Carolina, and in a group exhibition in Asheville. Biro says, "There was a time I was disconnected from the physical world and myself. A friend gave me a 'bag of bones' and I began a new phase in my life and artwork. My mixed-media sculptures come together as I allow my visual fantasies and stories to come alive. My work

is meant to honor all living things in this world of plants, rocks, water, air, animals and man. The skulls I use are all found in the woods or on the road. By making them a major part of each work, I experience the natural world of life and death and the essence of continuance."

Ultimately, Biro's powerful and highly individualized sculptures and totem pole-like constructions and installations can convey impressions that are at turns tribal/ceremonial/decorative/reverent/ritualistic/ even pagan. Her jewelry (and its design) is both beautiful and balanced, ranging from weighty, classical, Mexican/Etruscan-looking turquoise necklaces with demi-lune pendant to more effusive, free-form, "costume"-inspired pieces of lighter, pinker hues and silver baubles with assorted stones and beads. Taken in tandem, Biro's totems and work (both sculpture and jewelry) work well together.

Also in October, it is with great pleasure that **art6** introduces a new series—**The Pinkney Near Memorial Lectures in Art History**—and its first speaker, art historian and guest lecturer **Mia Reinoso Genoni** of New York University. The series is named in honor of the first chief curator of the **Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**, **Pinkney Near**, who died in 1990. A specialist in Italian Renaissance art and French Romanesque sculpture, Pinkney Near was much loved and respected by the Richmond art community, constantly encouraging and supporting all the arts with his generous and liberal spirit. A Harvard-trained art historian, Near spent his last two years at the VMFA as Curator of the Mellon Collection. Very much interested in contemporary art, he was the husband of artist and **art6** co-founder and co-director **Henrietta Near**. First proposed by **art6** co-director **Mitzi Humphrey**, the series will feature distinguished scholars of art history, drawn from museums and institutions of higher learning in Virginia and elsewhere.

The first speaker in the series, **Mia Reinoso Genoni**, has an A.B.D. from the Institute for the Arts at New York University, where she also received an M.S. in the History of Art and Architecture. She received an A.B. degree from Harvard University, earned in both Fine Arts (History of Art and Architecture) and in English and American Literature. She has lived and studied in Paris and done research throughout Europe. Genoni primarily focuses on Renaissance Studies and on Modern and Contemporary Art of Europe and America, specializing in art history and historiography, as well as in word and image relationships, issues of visual culture and identity, and "looking at the overlooked." At **art6** Genoni will speak on the topic **Collect/Recollect: Approaches in Contemporary Art**. Friday, October 22, 8pm. \$5 donation.

On Sunday, October 24, at 4pm, scheduled by the **art6 Performing Arts Series**, artist/educator and lecturer **Jorge Benitez** of Virginia Commonwealth University will speak on the subject **Art in an Age of Intolerance**. Admission is free. TMH

For more about this and other upcoming **art6** events, visit www.art6.org or phone 804.343.1406. To contact the editor of **art6** and **BroadStrokes**, phone **Thomas M. Humphrey** at 804.794.7579. **art6** is located at 6 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219. Gallery hours are Wed.-Sun., 12-4pm.

