

# EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

Alejandro Anreus & RoCa - October 21, 2014

**AA:** Would you say that you are a spiritual person? Do you acknowledge the spiritual element in your work?

**RC:** *I attended Catholic school and was raised in the religion. My questioning or reinterpretations of the bible stories define the influence of Catholicism in my work. I took traditions from the past and presented a more modern, symbolic image, which is approachable and identifiable for the new generation. My work is naturally an extension of myself, and the mystical must be reflected if it is interpreted as such. There are components of it that make it have deep significance to the beholder. And what greater gift is there, than when one's creation can resonate in others their own other-worldliness? The viewer's connection confirms, validates my spirituality and the spiritual element in my work.*

**AA:** Your paintings have a visual presence that evokes Byzantine icons and works of religious art in general – are you aware of this? Is this a deliberate influence in your work?

**RC:** *The evocation of Byzantine icons and religious art in my Acrollage paintings was not deliberate, but unintentionally intuitive through my fascination, as a young person, by the rituals of the church. The saints, painted images, altars, vestments, sacraments and ceremony, captivated me. This extended my pictorial interests to religious paintings and Russian icons.*

**AA:** You mention the word Acrollage, which you coined to define your painting technique. Could you tell me how you came about this?

**RC:** *I was constantly being questioned about my technique. Unbeknownst to me, I was developing a way of working that could not be described by using mainstream terms for the medium. Hence "Acrollage painting" was coined. Defining it gave clarity to the viewers.*

**AA:** What art has influenced your work?

**RC:** *In the beginning I had no real guidance. I stumbled upon my early influences when as a young person I went to the Brooklyn Museum and for the first time saw Egyptian hieroglyphs, African sculptures, frescoes and mosaics from the Greco-Roman world. Later my mother introduced me to both Puerto Rican and Polish posters, which affected me with their color and design. When I was older and able to travel to Manhattan I ventured to the various museums in the city. There I saw work that stood out and moved me, by Picasso and Matisse, Kline, Krasner and O'Keeffe, but also Velásquez, Courbet, Braque, Gris, Schwitters and Mondrian.*

**AA:** Which collage artists have you looked at and studied?

**RC:** *I have tended to be attracted to the collage work of the Dadaists, Constructivists, Abstract, Cubist and Minimalist artists. The collages of Kurt Schwitters fascinated me. When I attended the Art Students League in New York, I studied with a master collage artist, Leo Manso, who gave me the passion to pursue collage.*

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**AA:** Tell me about your association with El Taller Boricua.

**RC:** *I was in a group show and at the reception I met Fernando Salicrup and Marcos Dimas from Taller Boricua. They invited me to apply for an artist's residency at the Taller, which I did, even though I was still attending the Art Students League. I received the residency. At the Taller my fellow colleagues were Jorge Soto, Manny Vega, Gilberto Hernández, Sigfrido Benitez, José Rodríguez, and Néstor Otero, who to this day has been a friend and beacon in my life and career.*

**AA:** Do you identify as a Nuyorican artist, and the politics that this implies?

**RC:** *I am defined by, but not limited to being a Nuyorican, and I embrace all that is an extension of my heritage and beliefs. I gather inner strengths from the never-ending struggles that we deal with as a people, as well as an individual.*

**AA:** How would you define yourself politically?

**RC:** *My opinions are outspoken in action, not in words. They exist in the way I live or present myself. I foster liberty and dare to be intrepid. In the complex and interwoven moments in my work I explore themes of spirituality, sexuality, socio-cultural and political behavior. I do this in a manner not to judge or impose, but to enlighten, to realize and dignify my themes in a humanitarian, pragmatic manner.*

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