hocus with an urban focus
recent works by orlando cuevas

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“Once I believed I lived these closed row of tenements, the shot gunned houses bunched uselessly against the coming of another day. Now the stars settle down, easing themselves into the river.” — From “Burned” by Phillip Levine

I met Orlando Cuevas in the spring of 1989. He was finishing his undergraduate degree at Jersey City College, and already exhibiting as a young sculptor of promise. This was at the end of the Reagan era; Bush was in the White House, the NEA was being cut and the war against multiculturalism was being waged. Cuevas and a handful of like-minded artists, founded the art collective Artfux – from 1989 to 1992. Their billboards, posters, exhibitions, and actions were the rage of Hudson County, New York City, Washington DC, and even Germany.
Starting in 1992, Orlando Cuevas returned to his own work: sculpture, drawing and printmaking. If his early work shared a similar sensibility with the likes of Red Grooms and Edward Kienholz, for the past five years Cuevas has been working in his very own, highly personal and authentic visual vocabulary.

Orlando Cuevas is a sculptor of the city. Yes, Jersey City, but also of any east coast, culturally diverse metropolis: New York, Philadelphia, Newark, Boston etc. His “landscapes” – constructed with wood, cardboard, wax and pigments – depict the tenements, bodegas, churches, theatres and courthouses of the city, with an attention to detail and formal rigor, which draw the viewer into a multi-layered universe of both goodies and terrors. A clothesline, a back alley, a graffiti covered wall, a mangy dog next to a garbage can, become, in Cuevas’ hands, moments of sheer poetry. The “toys” that Cuevas constructs, reflect every nuance of the human condi-
tion, from the grotesque to the tender. All of his work is charged with
humor—the Puertorican, Carribean kind of humor: full of survival and
vigor, and embracing life in all its miseries and glories.

The bricks of the buildings whistle, a door can speak to us of the
depths of the human heart, and a broken window will remind us of
the battles against despair that are waged daily in urban America.
Cuevas in his highly detailed sculptures, drawings and prints, cap-
tures the “inner life” of buildings, the souls of things, and with this, the
daily lives of those who inhabit them, those who sleep, and make love, and eat
and dream, those who read stories to their children at bedtime, those who
pray to God, or die forgotten, those who laugh, yes, laugh, in the tenements, in
the churches, in the back alleys, in the parks of Jersey City, or any city.

Orlando Cuevas is a magician, who in his landscapes and toys, gifts us
moments of epiphany. The clothesline sings to us: Rejoice, Rejoice!

Alejandro Anreus, Ph.D.
I am always excited by the common bond we all share in finding beauty in the most uncommon places and things. I see beauty and magic all around me daily, in the smile of a child, or the movement of a cloud as it sails across the sky. I see it in the miracle of a skyscraper and the cracks in the sidewalk that take form and create images. Some people see elephants in those clouds and yet others may see images on a shadow cast from a streetlight. These are all proof of art and magic present in our lives. — Orlando Cuevas

At the turn of the millennia The Star Ledger named Orlando Cuevas as one of “20 for 2000,” listing him among other top rising New Jersey artists and performers — faces to watch for in the new century.

The artist’s work was most recently reviewed by Washington Post writer Jessica Dawson who describes it as neo-pop, borrowing images and objects from mass-culture and having affinities to the Low Brow movement on the West Coast.

In Cuevas’ work “memories are preserved...every bit the social satirist... Cuevas ingeniously models his creatures...allegories of power.”

—William Zimmer, Art Critic
The New York Times

Cuevas “defines the Jersey City aesthetic.”

—Dan Bischoff, Art Critic
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