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MoLAA's two new exhibits explore ideas of how memory relates to place

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“Rocas,” oil on canvas by Roberto Montenegro, c. 1960

The Museum of Latin American Art, 628 Alamitos Ave., is kicking off the new year with two new exhibitions.

Anywhere Better Than This Place: Selections from MOLAA's Permanent Collection will run from Jan. 12 to July 1. This new rotation of the museum's permanent collection, curated by Selene Preciado, will explore themes of memory and desire in relation to a place or landscape. The photomechanical prints by Félix González-Torres titled *Nowhere Better Than This Place* and *Somewhere Better Than This Place*, 1989-90 serve as an introduction to this idea and give the exhibition its title. The prints by González-Torres are statements of longing for a place that existed in the past, is ceasing to exist, is about to exist or which never existed. Through the use of language, they also become a sort of metaphorical landscape.

Anywhere Better Than This Place includes works on paper, photography, sculpture, installations and video about spaces or landscapes that could trigger a memory or challenge the imagination of the viewer. Ranging from paintings of landscapes and places by modern artists such as Roberto Montenegro (Mexico, 1887-1968), David Alfaro Siqueiros (Mexico, 1896-1974) and José Gurvich (Lithuania/Uruguay, 1927-1974), to contemporary photographic works by Ingrid Hernández (Mexico, b. 1974), Abelardo Morell (Cuba, b. 1948), and video installations by Clemencia Echeverri (Colombia, b. 1950) and Mario Opazo (Colombia, b. 1969), the exhibition presents a wide array of representations of place and landscape that are imaginary or based on reality.

In the case of Roberto Montenegro's work "Rocas/ Rocks" (c. 1960), there is a traditional representation of a rocky mountain seen from below. Montenegro's work was often allegorical, but he also made use of the portrait and the landscape to represent critical aspects of the society of his time. He was the first artist who introduced Art Deco to Mexico, and he did so by combining it with elements of popular and pre-Columbian art. Artist Clemencia Echeverri's audio-visual installation titled "Treno (Canto Fúnebre)/ Treno (Funeral Chant)" (2007) presents two large-scale projections of the flow of the river Cauca, one of the most important rivers in Colombia. These images along with the soundtrack of the river and of a gloomy calling of people in a "sad chant" are a metaphor for helplessness and death. It can be interpreted as being about Echeverri's native Colombia or about anywhere else in the world. Carlos Garaicoa's "Acerca de la Construcción de la Verdadera Torre de Babel" (1996), a commentary on ruins and utopia, is also an example of the representation of landscape based in a real place with the incorporation of elements of the imagination. Garaicoa draws an architectural solution next to the photograph of an urban space in ruins in Havana, Cuba which is unfeasible and absurd.

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