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AROUND THE
GALLERIES

Visions from Tijuana

BY LEAH OLLMAN

Hugo Crosthwaite has left his indelible mark in group shows across L.A. in recent years, but hasn't had a solo outing here since 2005. His work now occupies Luis De Jesus in the fullest sense of the word. It takes possession of the space; it claims complete visual, emotional, and physical attention.

Crosthwaite was born in Tijuana, grew up in Rosarito, Mexico, attended college in San Diego and now divides his time between Brooklyn and Rosarito. The show, "Tijuanerias," like much of his prior work, scrutinizes his hometown with tenderness, toughness, a knowing eye and a lively sense of humor.

Crosthwaite fills the first gallery with 102 small (roughly 5 by 8 inch) ink drawings with the immediacy and intensity of snapshots able to capture not just a moment in time but all the tributaries of history, myth and popular culture that inform it. The images compress high and low, living and dead, real and imagined in one dense, engrossing sheet after another. There are hints of Goya, echoes of Posada. Graffiti tags, tattoo art, cartoons. The melodrama of a telenovela, the grit of an urban chronicle.

The sordid and delectable crowd together just as they do in the border city itself. In one piece, a woman stands with her arms raised overhead. A skeleton is traced atop her form like white icing. The man veering toward her with a dagger seems to be wearing an Aztec headdress, but his face, too, is reduced to a sketchy white cipher. Here the carnivalesque is ordinary, and the ordinary is



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carnavalesque.

Crosthwaite exploits the full potential of black, white and every tone in between, invoking ash, smoke, shadow. He's a phenomenal draughtsman, attuned to particularities of place and personality but deliciously subversive when it comes to physical proportions and the fluidity of space. Two torsos might rise from a single pair of slacks. Planes shift and tilt, mirroring Tijuana's legendary dynamism, multiplicity and resourcefulness.

In the gallery's second large room, Crosthwaite has scaled up some of the scenes and figures and woven them into a wildly energetic installation across 80 continuous feet of wall space. He graphically links the fragmented drawings on shaped rag board with props and clouds and directional motifs painted directly on the wall.

Two meticulously drawn heads mounted on the wall, for instance, have simple cartoonish bodies painted beneath them. One points a gun at the other and the bullets stutters a path between them.

Though physically immersive, the installation is, paradoxically, less viscerally compelling than the small, discrete works, but still plenty invigorating.

Throughout Crosthwaite's work, lust and violence are tempered by grace; tradition embraces surprise. Acts of witness marry feats of imagination, and a crazy equilibrium makes it all hang together.
