

# The New York Times

## ART REVIEW

### Expanding the Scope of ‘Latin American Art’

Eight not-to-be-missed shows offer scores of creators and local art traditions from New York, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, Mexico and South America.

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Prêfète Duffaut, a Haitian artist featured in “Popular Painters and Other Visionaries” at El Museo del Barrio. “Harbor, Vue de Jacmel Avec le Pont de Noël” (“View of Jacmel With the Noël Bridge”), from 1968, captures the seaport of Jacmel, where he lived and worked. Credit. Prêfète Duffaut and El Museo del Barrio.

You don’t need to know anything about art to be stopped in your tracks by what’s on the walls of El Museo del Barrio these days: the fantastic ballpoint pen drawings by Consuelo (Chelo) González Amézcuca (1903-1975), a Mexican immigrant to Texas; the stupefyingly intricate collages of Felipe Jesus Consalvos, who was born in Havana and died in Philadelphia, where in 1983 his life’s work was found in a garage sale; and the pictographic paintings of Puerto Rican-born Eloy Blanco (1933-1984), who came to New

York City to study art and learned from fellow Latinos about the Indigenous Taino culture of his homeland — a culture he ended up making the wellspring of his work. This season has brought a bounty of historical shows of Latin American and Latino art, two cultural categories that are closely related without being interchangeable. Latin American is generally understood to designate art originating in the southern hemisphere of the Americas. Latino (with its Latina and Latinx cognates) refers to work by artists of Latin American descent working in the United States. But both terms are spacious and mutable.

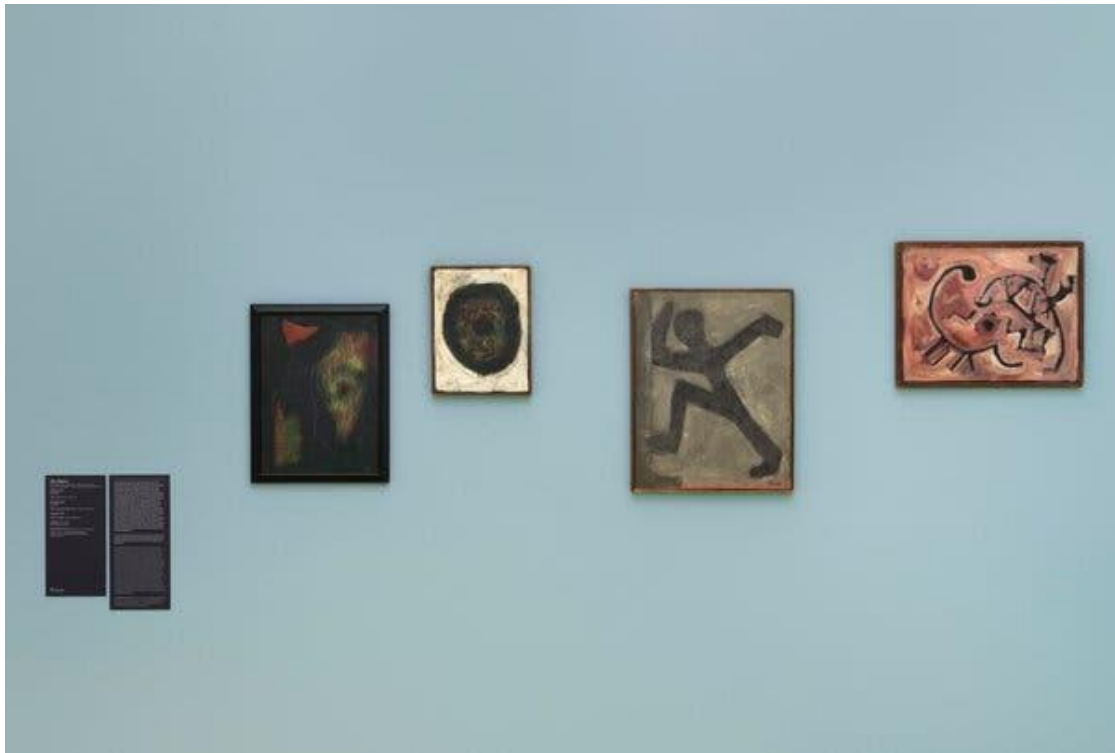


Consuelo (Chelo) González Amézcua, “In the Wood (En el bosque),” 1962. Ballpoint pen on paper.  
Credit. American Folk Art Museum.

## El Museo del Barrio

The two meet in a pair of exhibitions at El Museo del Barrio. The larger, “Popular Painters and Other Visionaries,” spotlights work by 35 artists — González Amézcua, Consalvos and Blanco among them — born in the first half of the 20th century. Most are from Latin America; and many are self-taught, which means that much of the work

doesn't adhere to the mainstream market definition of "Latin American art" as work influenced, and elevated, by an association with elite European modernism.

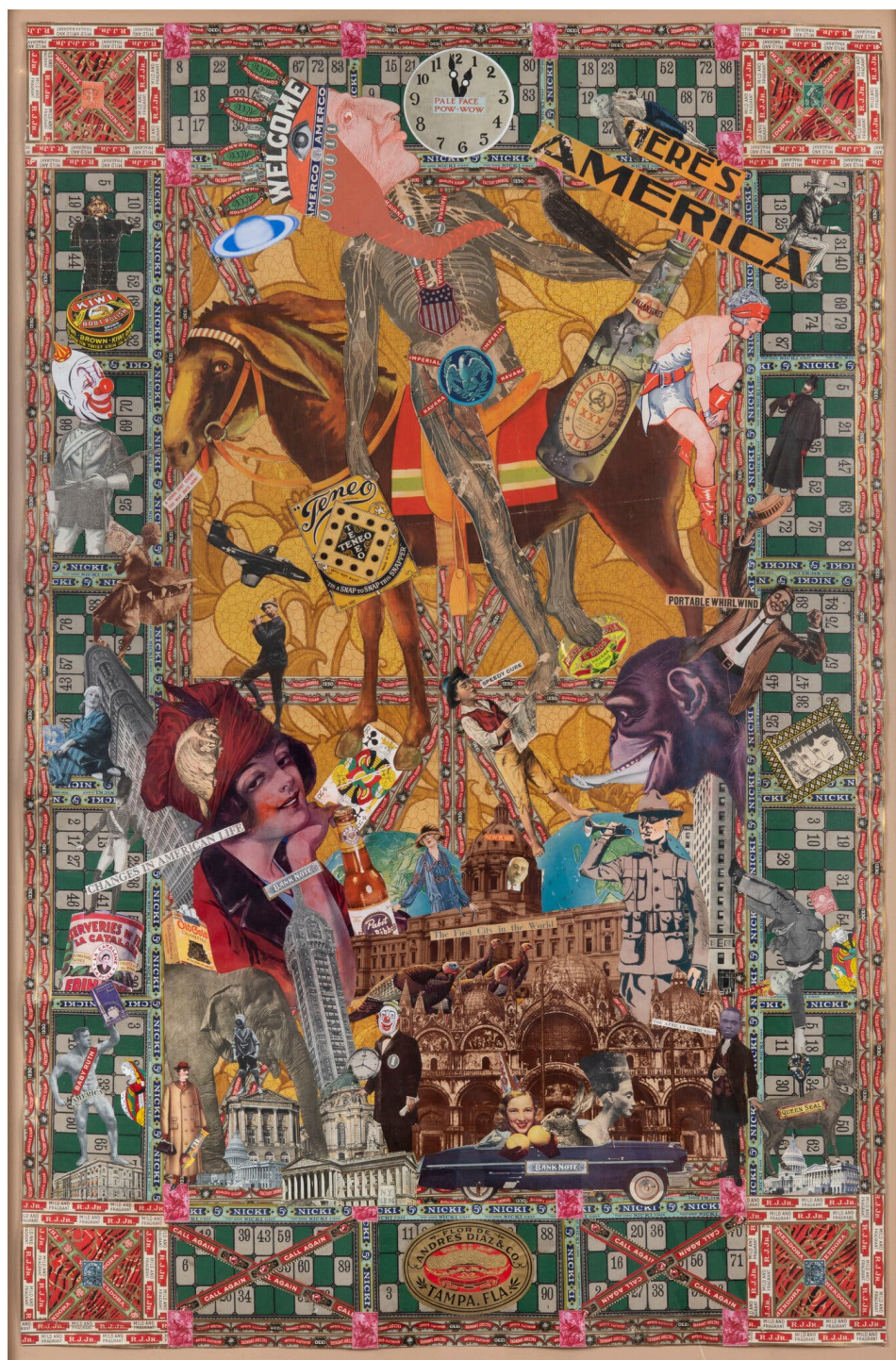


Installation view of "Popular Painters and Other Visionaries" at El Museo del Barrio. From left, Eloy Blanco's "Untitled," 1951; "Untitled," 1966; "Samson," 1966; "Untitled," not dated. Credit. Martin Seck/El Museo del Barrio.

Organized by El Museo curators Rodrigo Moura and Susanna V. Temkin, the show offers a counterargument from the start, with a display of three banners, glinting with sequins, and embroidered with mystical symbols. They were made by Antoine Oleyant (1955-1992), a Vodou priest from Haiti, and represent a distinctive local art tradition, one with clear Afro-Atlantic sources.

Other pieces, many culled from El Museo's permanent collection, support the case for an expanded view of Latin American art, one that incorporates 1950s paintings of Yoruba myths by Rafael Borjes de Oliveira, a Brazilian policeman and Candomblé devotee, along with Asilia Guillén's stitch-fine depictions of scenes from Nicaraguan history; but also the work of Latinx artists like Consalvos and Blanco, who were born in Latin America but spent their creative years in the United States.

Consalvos is thought to have died around 1960, on the cusp of a decade of intense Latino activism in North American cities, in reaction to racist neglect and aggression. As always, New York's Puerto Rican community had to see to its own survival, which included preserving its history.



Felipe Jesús Consalvos, “Here's America (Aquí está América),” c. 1920-1950, mixed media collage. Credit: Andrew Edlin Gallery.

To this end, in 1974, three young photographers — Charles Biasiny-Rivera, Roger Cabán and Felipe Dante — formed En Foco, a collective devoted to documenting Latino life from the inside. And the second exhibition at El Museo, “En Foco: The New York Puerto Rican Experience, 1973-1974,” displays the group’s inaugural portfolio, made up of images of daily life in the streets and schools of the barrio, and among Latino laborers in and outside the city.