

UP NOW

Cai Guo-Qiang

Guggenheim Museum

Through May 28

Rarely has an artist packed a museum with as many ideas and so much visual excitement as has Cai Guo-Qiang in this



Cai Guo-Qiang, *Inopportune: Stage One*, 2004, nine cars and sequenced multichannel light tubes, dimensions variable. Guggenheim Museum.

celebratory retrospective. Filled with flying wolves and inflated sheepskins, real boats and a gallery-long river, exploding cars and drawings made with ignited gunpowder, the show demonstrates the vast imagination of the Chinese artist, who has been living in New York since 1995.

Visitors are greeted by *Inopportune: Stage One*, a re-creation of the 2004 installation. Here, nine cars suspended in the central atrium sprout rods of flickering lights, as if blasting through the space. The work is matched by *Inopportune: Stage Two* (2004), a band of writhing stuffed tigers pierced with arrows. It is no accident that both pieces involve violence, an obsession for this artist, who often uses gunpowder as a medium. What especially preoccupies Cai, who is deeply rooted in both Chinese culture and contemporary global art trends, is the violence of cultural collisions.

The exhibition presents several installations that were high points in the artist's career. His 1996 *Cry Dragon/Cry Wolf: The Ark of Genghis Kahn*, which earned him a nomination for the Hugo Boss Prize that year, consists of a raft of sheepskins hovering near the ceiling, powered by hot air from three Toyota car engines. And *The Rent Collector's Courtyard*, featuring

an exact re-creation of a set of iconic Socialist Realist statuary that was made by Chinese artists during the Cultural Revolution, will be assembled by Chinese craftsmen on a ramp of the museum over the course of the exhibition. The original installation won Cai the Golden Lion at the 1999 Venice Biennale.

But Cai, who has been appointed artistic director of this year's Summer Olympics, is best known for his fire-works displays, which are shown here in films documenting events, such as *Transient Rainbow* (2002), commissioned by New York's Museum of Modern Art, which took place over the East River. The works here demonstrate the scope and ambition of this artist, who is too talented and original to be simply subsumed by the rubric of "Chinese contemporary artist." This spectacular retrospective proves how worthy he is of all the attention he is receiving. —Barbara Pollack

UP NOW

'Arte≠Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960-2000'

El Museo del Barrio

Through May 18

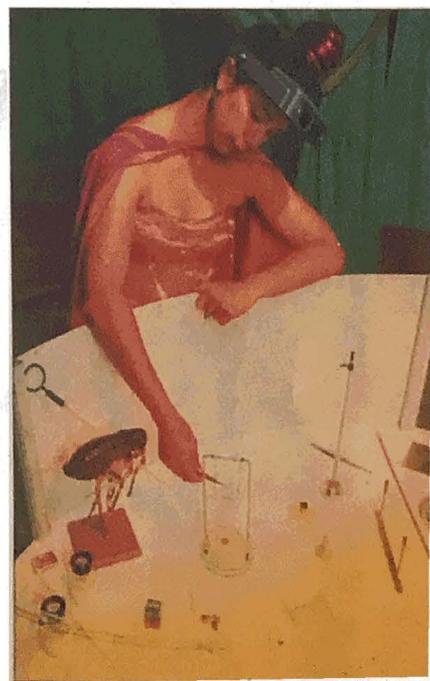
In response to the uncertain, often brutal social and political conditions in the Caribbean and Latin America, artists throughout the Americas have turned their energies to performance to make their voices heard and their ideas known. As individuals and as collectives, they have taken to the streets and other public places to perform interactive events ranging from the whimsical to the courageously subversive.

This show presents work by more than 100 artists from Central and South America, along with Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, who, between 1960 and 2000, were active in their home countries, the United States, or Europe. Some of the names are familiar—Ana Mendieta, Hélio Oiticica, Alfredo Jaar, Felix Gonzalez-Torres—others are less so. Organized by Deborah Cullen, director of curatorial programs at the museum, this is an exhaustive and sometimes exhausting survey that contains few actual art objects but lots of photos, videos, wall text, and other documentation arranged

thematically, under such headings as "Destructivism," "Dreamscapes," and "Diversions."

Here is Raphael Montañez Ortiz, the founder and first director of El Museo, destroying a piano in the mid-1960s, echoing experiments by Nam June Paik and John Cage. Photographs document Brazilian Artur Barrio's "Bloody Bundles" (1970), parts of butchered animals wrapped in sheets and scattered around Rio de Janeiro. Lygia Clark's invitation to make your own Möbius strip (paper, scissors, and instructions provided) and Oiticica's video of ordinary people wearing capes he designed characterize these two Brazilian artists' involvement in social interaction and transformation—taking art off the easels. Politics plays a charged role in Oscar Bony's photograph *La familia obrera* (1968). His subjects were paid twice their usual wage to appear in an installation. The show also documents the urban interventions of the collectives ASCO and CADA, the latter formed during the Pinochet regime.

Ingenuity and wit are evident in Colombian artist María Fernanda Cardoso's 1997 video of her famous flea circus and Maris Bustamante's 1982 *Para quitarle a Freud lo macho* (To Get Rid of the Macho in Freud), photographs of



María Fernanda Cardoso, still from *Cardoso Flea Circus*, 1997, video, 7 minutes, 18 seconds. El Museo del Barrio.

women wearing masks with penis noses.

Although art is not the same as life, or vice versa, as the show's title implies, it can try to illumine, upend, and alleviate inequities and absurdities. —Ann Landi