

"Aqui" at USC

"Aqui", an exhibition of work by 27 Latin American artists living and working in the U.S., reveals only one common concern: political oppression by outsiders. The most effective practitioner is Luis Camnitzer from Uruguay. From the east wall of USC's Fisher Gallery, a glass eye stares straight at you. Beneath, a scrap of paper is scrawled with the words "he approached with a smile. He thought this time he could bear it when." The ambiguity of this note first reminded me of an excerpt from a lover's diary, but the same note is accompanied sequentially by a bit of exposed wire, a blood-tipped needle, a lock of hair. *From the Uruguayan Tortures* is the title, and the subtlety is an art in itself.

Less subtle, but powerful in its own way, is Chilean Alfredo Jaar's *Motherland, Motherland*,

social condition. There is an expressionist shoot-out chase scene by L.A.'s Carlos Almaraz; Cuba's Luis Cruz Azaceta depicts a crazed beast-man behind the wheel of a car, sweating and pierced with a hundred nails, his mid-section completely removed. Or there is *El Gran Cannibal* by Puerto Rico's Rafael Ferrer, a four-sided tent painted with expressionist yearnings for a carefree life on some romantic desert island.

Many of the artists demonstrate a connection to their native traditions and to nature — Cuban Ana Mendieta has created a sculpture out of charred grasses, molded to resemble a primitive, abstracted female body. It is temporal and oddly affecting and is hidden behind the Fisher Gallery on a little bit of lawn. At the other end of the spectrum, there are the baroque zig-zaggy arch and columns covered in gold veneer by Mexican sculptor Ricardo Reggazzoni. On the line between



El Gran Canibal by Rafael Ferrer.

Alan Zindman

What Mother? What Land? That title is penciled on the wall above four large photographs, the first a drawing of South American natives; the second, those natives meeting the conquistadores; the third, a landing boat of American Marines; the fourth, a line of military police holding clubs, their heads cropped out of the photo. Before each photo is a mound of earth, like a freshly dug grave, topped by rods of green neon.

Other works may be less overtly political but often comment upon our anxious

architecture and art, they are both stupendously effective upon entering the gallery, and are the only "art about art" statement in the show.

The *Aqui* artists relegated to the Atelier on the third floor of Santa Monica Place are not represented as strongly. A couple of small paintings by L.A.'s Gil de Montes, along with those by Carlos Almaraz, are the most interesting. (At Fisher Gallery, USC, through December 15; at the Atelier through December 23.)

—Hunter Drohojowska