

Enrique Chagoya: *Liberty*

Enrique Chagoya playfully examines contemporary cultural and internal borders in his first tapestry, *Liberty*. The work is a unique original, translated from a composite of collaged, painted, and drawn elements assembled digitally by Chagoya and Magnolia Editions co-director Donald Farnsworth. Chagoya's trademark wit and spontaneity are reflected in the result, which projects both a formal strength and a light-hearted energy.

Liberty depicts a plush domestic interior, reduced to a flat anonymity using stark red lines; its placid blankness is interrupted by the presence of dinosaurs, originally rendered in bold strokes of charcoal. In the foreground, a tiny, "realistically" colored dinosaur bearing the head of Jesus is menaced by an enormous Tyrannosaurus while resting upon the stenciled word "LIBERTY." Besides the impersonal and military connotations of the stencil, its letters are reversed, suggesting an inversion of the word's meaning and perhaps implying that it is being stenciled onto the viewer. As Chagoya's ghostly, carbon-black dinosaurs chase the hybrid Jesus figure almost off the edge of the tapestry, they touch upon both the looming spectre of America's dependence on fossil fuels and the ideological masks donned by warring powers to justify their violent actions.

About the Magnolia Tapestry Project

The Magnolia Tapestry Project emerged from artist John Nava's commission to decorate the vast interior walls of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, which required a consideration of the acoustical demands of the space: the decorative element was to function practically by reducing unwanted reverberation, prompting an inquiry into the use of textiles. Nava and Farnsworth subsequently collaborated on a series of woven experiments which grew into an unorthodox approach to Jacquard weaving. Using this approach, work by contemporary artists is faithfully translated into a digital "weave file" using custom calibrated color palettes developed at Magnolia Editions. The completed weave file is woven in Belgium on a double-headed Jacquard loom, where 17,800 available warp threads generate colors of unprecedented variety and density. As the tapestry translation process evolves, various textural elements can be reproduced with clarity – in this light, *Liberty* is particularly notable for the legibility of even the most subtle of Chagoya's charcoal marks, which appear as if applied directly to the woven surface.



Enrique Chagoya, *Liberty*, 2006 - Jacquard Tapestry, 72 x 74 in. Edition of 8

I don't know why people tend to be so outrageously tilted in one direction. It makes them pure, or purer, or something. It's a fantasy, because nothing is black or white anywhere. There is always a conflict between fundamentalism and reality that is more complex than simple, one-sided, moralistic values. Reality is just richer. In many ways, the reality of the human experience [is] completely wilder than any boundary that we could limit.

- Enrique Chagoya

In the same way that Tamarind and Gemini put the commercial lithographic technology of the 19th century into the hands of fine artists in the fifties and sixties, the Magnolia Tapestry Project is putting the electronic Jacquard loom to work in unexpected ways for today's artists. The Project includes tapestries representative of several generations and numerous art movements: the Pop princesses of Mel Ramos; the monumental, Expressionistic figures of Leon Golub; the hyper-realism of Alan Magee and Guy Diehl; the playful poetics of Squeak Carnwath and William Wiley; the post-Surrealist visions of Bruce Conner, and the abstractions of Ed Moses and George Miyasaki are all re-envisioned in striking new editions. The Magnolia Tapestry Project has also produced tapestries by Chuck Close, Lia Cook, Lewis deSoto, Donald and Era Farnsworth, Rupert Garcia, Diane Andrews Hall, Gus Heinze, Robert Kushner, John Nava, Nancy Spero, Katherine Westerhout and others. ■