

Enrique Chagoya

Enrique Chagoya's rollicking, acerbic carnival of semiotics continues in *New Illegal Alien's Guide to Critical Theory*. The *Guide* takes the form of a 94-inch wide mixed media work incorporating pigmented ink and acrylic on multiple layers of plexiglas and amate. Its horizontal composition and the use of amate paper, made from bark and imported from Mexico, are reminiscent of the pre-Hispanic codex books of the indigenous Maya and Aztec peoples. Mapping visual links between art history and colonialism, Chagoya's *Guide* explores the theme of artistic or creative production and its relation to shifting cultural and ideological borders while steadfastly rejecting dogma or unilateral interpretation. Its characters interact before the backdrop of a long, continuous wall, a picture plane within the picture plane punctuated by imagery, graffiti, and glyphs from multiple languages and pictorial traditions. As always, Chagoya's work is less about imparting a fixed message or meaning and more about investigating the shifting, relational nature of meaning itself.

The work is a composite of multiple printed and painted elements on amate paper and plexiglas, layered so that the figures on plexiglas are superimposed over the surface of the amate. This layering of picture planes mirrors the multiple layers of meaning invoked by the intellectual plate tectonics of Chagoya's method, wherein the borders of various traditions, histories, and languages collide, overlap, and are transformed in ambiguous, often paradoxical relation to one another. Magnolia Editions is publishing the *Guide* as



Enrique Chagoya, *New Illegal Alien's Guide to Critical Theory*, 2008 (Detail)
Pigment and acrylic on plexiglas and amate, 12 x 94 in.

a series, each one of which will vary in both its imagery and construction. As in history, characters and ideas will enter and exit and the landscape will change. One version of the *Guide* is an ambitious and unusual three-dimensional work which has no designated front or back; instead, it can be viewed from either side, each displaying a unique image. The hybrid identities of the foreground figures and the free interplay between ancient and contemporary in the anachronistic time-travel of their amate counterparts find a physical analog in the double-sided nature of the work's construction, which assumes no one fixed vantage point. ■



Enrique Chagoya, *New Illegal Alien's Guide to Critical Theory*, 2008 - Pigment and acrylic on plexiglas and amate, 12 x 94 in.