

ANA SERRANO

SALON OF
BEAUTY





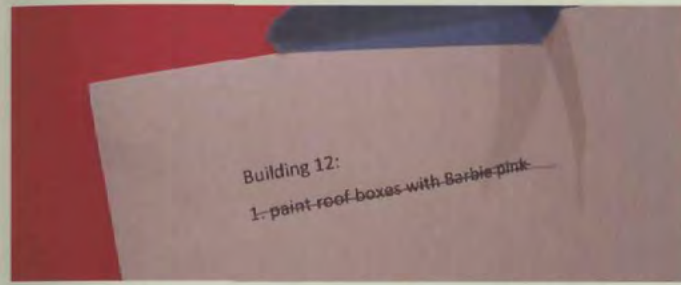
ANA SERRANO

SALON OF BEAUTY

29 September – 11 December 2011

Rice Gallery
HOUSTON, TEXAS





FOREWORD

To create the world that was *Salon of Beauty*, Ana Serrano drew from the inventory of architectural and socio-cultural details she notices and photographs on her walks through Los Angeles's working-class neighborhoods.

A native *Angeleña*, Serrano sees beauty in those aspects of the urban landscape that most of us would consider to be insignificant or ugly; re-imagined, these became the heart and soul of *Salon of Beauty*. Elegantly stylized and crafted with stunning exactitude from cardboard and paint, these elements depicted the familiar, but least hopeful glimpses of inner-city street life – weeds pushing up through a cracked sidewalk, caged air conditioners, a strip club, roofs outlined in barbed wire – co-existing with the most optimistic: a porch full of flowers, a nail salon, brightly colored walls, and in a bakery window, an extravagant quinceñera cake.

Constructing the complex installation was a massive undertaking, requiring a month of intensive on-site labor in addition to the many parts Ana made in advance in her studio. Serrano's normal role as an individual artist working solo expanded to include the roles of teacher and general contractor overseeing the scheduling, training, and management of a crew of up to five assistants on any given day. We thank each Rice student and staff member who worked with Ana Serrano including Rachel Gibbs (Architecture), Sara Hieb (Architecture), and Katia Zavistovski (Art History), who assisted with the precise cutting, painting, and gluing of cardboard required. Carlos Amaro, Engineering Design Technician at Rice's Oshman Engineering Design Kitchen, and Matthew Wettergreen, Assistant Director for Bioengineering's Rapid Prototyping Design Program, contributed their time and skill in overseeing the laser cutting.

We were thrilled to highlight Rice's many resources in planning the interdisciplinary programming that accompanied *Salon of Beauty*. Architecture seniors Joshua Herzstein and Peter Stone discussed unique elements of Mexico City's architecture in their talk, *Eccentri(city): Curiosities within the Urban Realm*. Graduate students Natalie Parker (Music) and Dawson White (Music) planned *Notes on Color*, a concert for Rice Gallery's New Art / New Music series, in which they were joined by fellow Shepherd School of Music students Gina Choi, Rebekah Daley, Robert Landes, Lisa Park, Masha Popova, Geoffrey Sanford, and Hellen Weberpal.

José Aranda, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Hispanic Studies, took Ana Serrano on a tour of Houston's Hispanic neighborhoods during her site visit. Professor Aranda's talk, *When We Arrive: Home in the Mexican-American Literary Imaginary*, for our noontime Professors' Perspectives series was a moving account of growing up in the Houston barrio of Magnolia. Gisela Heffes, Assistant Professor of Hispanic Studies, presented *Cardboard Recycling in Latin America: An Aesthetic Proposal or Environmental Justice?* as well as her video based on her short story, *Las Ciudades en Miniatura*. A standing-room only audience attended *Insights on Color & Architecture*, an evening talk by Carlos Jiménez, Professor in the School of Architecture. Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research organized the panel *Urban Perspectives on Salon of Beauty*, on which Ana Serrano and scholars from a variety of disciplines discussed the installation as it related to their research on urban issues. We are extremely grateful to all who took part in activities that enriched the experience of Ana Serrano's installation and highlighted Rice University's extraordinary artistic and intellectual resources.

We thank Francesca Fuchs, Department Head of Painting at the Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, instructor for the workshop Color 101; Mary Wemple, whose series *Words & Art* featured original poetry and prose inspired by *Salon of Beauty*; and Catherine Spain, Spanish teacher at St. John's School, Houston, who invited Ana Serrano to talk about her work in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Day.

Assistant Curator Joshua Fischer saw a photograph of Ana Serrano with her sculpture, *Cartonlandia* (2006) on the cover of *Juxtapoz Handmade* (Weber, Diana, ed. Berkeley: Gingko Press, Inc., 2010.). From this tiny image of a 5-foot tall sculpture, the largest she had made at that time, Josh sensed Ana's potential ability to create a huge installation. This kind of artistic insight is rare indeed!

Salon of Beauty and equally, Ana's presence here, were gifts to our campus and our city, and from the bottoms of our hearts we thank her.

Kimberly Davenport
Director

INTRODUCTION

I first saw Ana Serrano's work in an image of *Cartonlandia* (2008), a sculptural mountain of cascading homes made from brightly painted cardboard. *Cartonlandia's* inspiration was a trip Serrano took to Guanajuato, Mexico, and her interest in the spontaneous architecture of places like the inner-city *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. The five-foot sculpture captured the immensity and complexity of a city where tiny cars climbed a road that snaked around homes embellished with tiny windows, doors, and fences. Intrigued by this micro-world and its amazing detail, I looked at Ana Serrano's website to see more. Her most recent work was a series of cardboard sculptures of individual homes and stores representative of her experiences in Los Angeles' working class neighborhoods, where Serrano was born and continues to live. In one sculpture, tiny photographs of voltage meters lined a pink, electrical storage shed with a hand-painted "NO TRESPASSING" sign and coils of barbed wire along the roof. In another, an auto parts shop unexpectedly adjoined a pink and yellow piñata store. Serrano's buildings were stylized representations (not exact replicas) of humble icons of urban life, and I was immediately struck by her ability to transform the everyday and often overlooked into miniature monuments dedicated to a city she obviously loved.

After communicating via email and video chat, Ana came for a site visit to Rice Gallery in February 2011. One of the first things she did was show us one of her cardboard buildings. Called *LA Liquor* (2009), it was an amalgamation of different details Ana had seen on liquor stores throughout the city: a cartoon dog sipping a slushie, the words ATM LOTTO MONEY ORDERS hand painted on the store's back wall, and a big, boxy red Marlboro cigarette sign. It was great to finally see one of her sculptures in person, but it also immediately brought to the forefront the issue of size and scale. These were small works of art, not much bigger than a shoebox, and the gallery is a 40x44 foot space. Finding a way to translate her work from the small to the large scale would be a challenge, but it was one that Ana was eager to accept.

After her visit, she began working on a proposal, and we eventually settled on the basic plan to create an installation that would essentially be an imaginary neighborhood composed of adjoining homes and stores done at an almost human scale. Ana worked with a model she made of Rice Gallery, and she designed the basic shapes and sizes of the buildings to fit the space. Simultaneously, she

worked on the computer to figure out the exact dimensions of the individual buildings and the spacing between them. Once plans were finalized, she began creating in her Los Angeles studio many of the handmade architectural and decorative details to ship to Houston. Prior to her arrival, Rice Gallery staff made the unadorned buildings using simple two-by-four frames and cardboard cladding according to Serrano's detailed directions. In late August 2011, Serrano finally arrived for her month long residency in Houston. She immediately started adorning the plain buildings with typography, colorful tiles, brick and iron work, potted plants, enlarged photographic prints of windows and doors, and many other flourishes – nearly all of which were laboriously made by hand using cardboard, hot glue, and paint.

When Serrano finished *Salon of Beauty*, the gallery was an imaginary version of a neighborhood where the smallest details had been plucked away from the maelstrom of the city and playfully mixed together. As Ana explained, "I wanted to pull out everything that I liked in the city and then condense it." When visitors entered the gallery, they were confronted by a home's green façade with stacked white bricks and a brown fence below two windows with criss-crossed trim on top of horizontal stripes. The façade almost read as an abstract field of form, line, color, and pattern. As visitors continued to move along the installation's u-shaped path, they passed a "98 Cents" store with colorful typography, a mint green home with a fenced in porch, a hot pink bakery, and a check cashing store, among many other homes and businesses, some with obvious functions, others more ambiguous. Serrano noticed that the foyer space in front of the gallery was a passageway for students and faculty between the two sides of the building, and she designed *Salon of Beauty* as a kind of "detour" – a momentary departure from everyday routine.

Cartonlandia, 2006





Serrano had seen the title, *Salon of Beauty*, hand-painted on the side of a small beauty salon. She was struck by the phrase's slightly awkward yet poetic quality. Later she realized it was a literal translation of the Spanish phrase, *salón de belleza*, which would normally be translated into English as "Beauty Salon." The way she found the phrase and the word "beauty" resonated perfectly for Serrano in her hope to point out what she calls "untraditional beauty."

Visitors to the gallery saw in Ana's unique vision of urban life points of familiarity. For some, it was a nostalgic reminder of somewhere they had grown up or lived. One visitor wrote in the gallery guestbook, "Reminiscent of sights and sounds experienced in the summer of 1972 in Mexico City/Cuernavaca/Taxco – excellent exhibit!" Some visitors saw parts of Houston and others just loved the color and detail. One visitor called it the "aesthetic of the real." Evident in *Salon of Beauty* was Ana's incredible formal ability with line, shape, and color. During a studio visit, Ana showed me a poster she had on her door of the famous photograph of a bed-ridden Henri Matisse drawing while lying down. Ana's sense of composition and pattern owes as much to modern masters like Matisse as it does to the neighborhoods from which she drew her inspiration. I thank Ana for not only temporarily transforming Rice Gallery with her vision and virtuosity, but for changing the way I see my own city. The everyday details of urban life will never look the same again.

Joshua Fischer
Assistant Curator



ANA SERRANO
on Salon of Beauty

I was born in Los Angeles, and I've lived there my whole life. Much of the inspiration for my work comes from driving around the city. I have always been interested in the way in which homeowners and small business owners alter the façades of their residential or commercial buildings. For instance, I saw "Salon of Beauty" written on the wall of an actual beauty salon. My theory is that they were trying to translate *salón de belleza* – meaning "beauty salon" in Spanish – into English, which literally translates to "salon of beauty."

I don't think I ever have to tell viewers that the neighborhoods I reference in my work are those with a low socioeconomic demographic. This is apparent in the types of businesses I portray. However, my work presents political and social issues in a lighthearted way, often incorporating

humor, bright colors and bold fonts, and a sense of playfulness. I think this gets the point across more than if I were really heavy-handedly political.

I create my environments based on details that I'm attracted to. These details aren't always present right next to each other in the real world. But when you pull them out from various places and present them together in a setting such as this exhibition, you draw greater attention to them and you are able to really see them for what they are. Ideally, when you're taken back out of the gallery world and into the real world, you are then better able to appreciate these moments. You become more aware of them.

Edited excerpt from film by Mark and Angela Walley
DVD in back of exhibition catalogue



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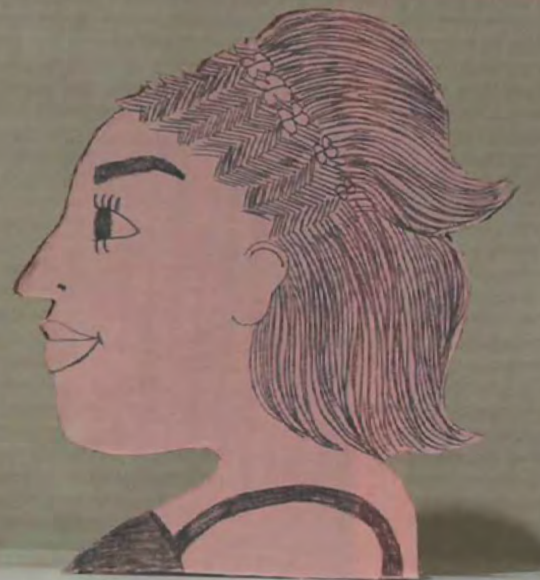
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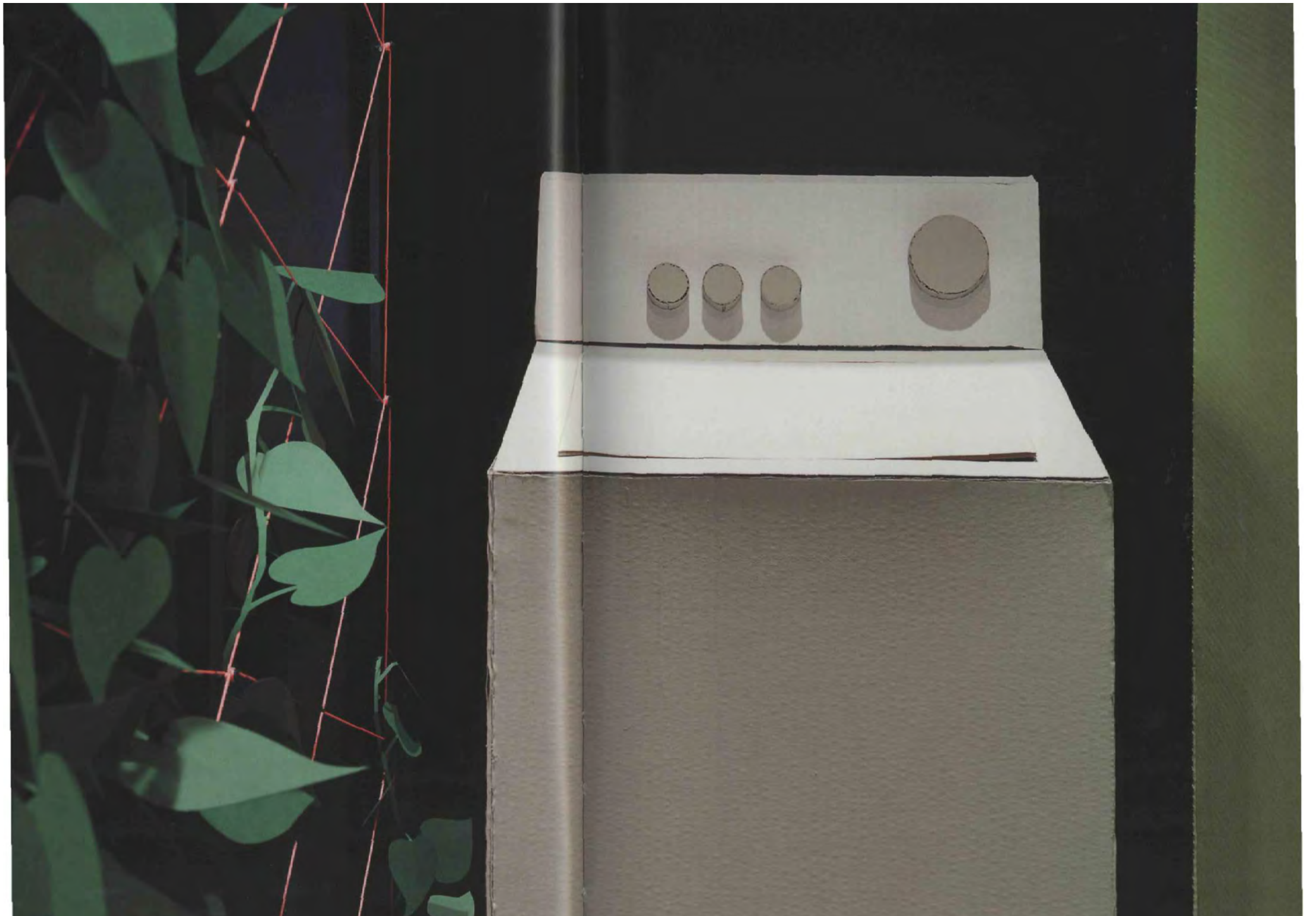
ICE COLD BEER

PLEASE
FRONT











Ana Serrano was born in Los Angeles, California. She has a BFA with Honors degree from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California (2008). Ana exhibits actively in solo, invitational, and group exhibitions, most recently in *A Daydreamer's Street* (solo, 2013), Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles, California; *Living Walls* (solo, 2013), Sarratt Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee; *Crossing Cultures: Ethnicity in Contemporary America* (2012), Sun Valley Center for the Arts, Sun Valley, Idaho; *Pretty Monumental* (solo, 2012), University Art Gallery at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, California; and *Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement* (commission, 2011), Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, California. Her work has been featured in the magazines *Literal*, *Latin American Voices*; *Lamono*; *American Style Magazine*, and *STEP Inside Design*, and in a number of important design books including *Illustration Play 2: An Expedition to the Extraordinary* (London: Victionary 2010); *Latino-Gráfico: Visual Culture from Latin America* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010); *Juxtapoz: Handmade* (cover, Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2009), and *Beyond Architecture: Imaginary Buildings and Fictional Cities* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2009). Ana Serrano lives and works in Los Angeles.





Ana Serrano, *Salon of Beauty*
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29 September – 11 December 2011

Rice University Art Gallery is located in Sewall Hall on the campus of Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005, and on the web at ricegallery.org.

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