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Georgia State University, Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design Galleries

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***"Transcultural Identities" & "Pierre Gonnord: Portraits", two photography exhibitions at the Welch School Galleries, Georgia State University***

Exhibit dates: **February 17 - March 18, 2011**  
Artist Gallery Talks: **Thursday, March 10, noon- 3:30 p.m.**  
Artists' reception: **Thursday, March 10, 3:30 - 6:00p.m.**

***Transcultural Identities***, an exhibition featuring photographic work by 6 internationally recognized artists, will be on view from **February 17 through March 18** at the Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design Galleries at Georgia State University.

Exhibiting artists are: Chuy Benitez, Tatiana Fiodorova, Priya Kambli, Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Wendy Phillips and Sylvia de Swaan. (more about the artists on pages 2-5)

The public is invited to an afternoon of gallery talks with Chuy Benitez, Priya Kambli, Wendy Phillips and Sylvia de Swaan on **Thursday, March 10**, from **noon until 3:30 p.m.** A reception and book signing will follow from **3:30 until 6:00 p.m.**

Curated by Welch School Galleries Director Cynthia Farnell, *Transcultural Identities* addresses the effects of human migration, displacement and global commerce on the formation of collective and individual identities. The artists use lens-based images to explore multifaceted (and sometimes conflicting) identities within themselves and their communities. Farnell says:

"In a large part we form our perception of self through identification with our communities. Whether these relationships are familial, cultural, geographical, political or economic, at some point we have all had the experience of reconciling our different selves with our diverse communities. The more we can empathize with this process in the lives of others, the more we will be able to create healthy and peaceful communities in our globalized world. *Transcultural Identities* is an exploration of this process through the common ground of the photographic image."

*Transcultural Identities* is supported in part by the Consulate General of Mexico to Atlanta and the GSU Student Activities Fund.

(More)

**Pierre Gonnord: Portraits** is a selection of striking large-scale color photographs imbued with dramatic painterly light and burnished palette that lends to the dignified subjects a timeless air. Pierre Gonnord is a French photographer living and working in Spain whose subjects are often individuals from marginalized communities. Gonnord says of his working methods:

“I choose my contemporaries in the anonymity of the big cities because their faces, under the skin, narrate unique, remarkable stories about our era. Sometimes hostile, almost always fragile and very often wounded behind the opacity of their masks, they represent specific social realities and, sometimes, another concept of beauty. I also try to approach the unclassifiable, timeless individual, to suggest things that have been repeated over and over since time began. I would like to encourage crossing a border. The history of the last few decades in the West, immigration, migrations, rural exodus, the feminist movement, the sexual revolution, economic crisis, the age of communication, globalization... all this has profoundly contributed to modifying mentalities and lifestyles to the point of severing the social fabric.

I search in the meeting points of the urban scene: streets, squares, cafes, stations, universities... then further still, in the peripheral districts, places so isolated from the world, and in more marginal settings such as prisons, hospitals, social shelters, rehabilitation centers, monasteries, or circuses. Because our society is there, as well...”

*Pierre Gonnord: Portraits* is supported in part by the Consulate General of France to Atlanta and the GSU Student Activities Fund. For more information and images, contact Cynthia Farnell, director at (404) 413-5230 or email at [cfarnell@gsu.edu](mailto:cfarnell@gsu.edu). All gallery programs are free and open to the public and accessible to persons with disabilities.

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More about the *Transcultural Identities* artists:

**Chuy Benitez** is a Chicano photographer, born in El Paso, Texas. He says:

“My family has lived on both sides of the Mexico/ United States border for generations. Growing up within a binational family provided me with a unique perspective of both nations and insight into the experience of navigating the borderlands, or *frontera*, and recognizing the cultural differences and influences of both countries. I received my Bachelor’s in Arts in 2005 at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, and was one of the first in my family to move away from the border for college...”

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Benitez, who received his MFA from the University of Houston, will be exhibiting panoramic images from his *Houston Cultura* series in *Transcultural Identities*. In a statement about the work he says:

“When I moved to Houston in 2005, I found that the Mexican American community there was rarely documented and was filled with miles of uncharted territory to be encountered and photographed... These images were made to bring appreciation to the cultural vibrance of the Mexican American community in Houston. The community is young but it is one of the fastest growing and one of the largest in the country. It also brings with it an interesting display of cultural survival in an extremely urban environment. I have been able to photograph many instances of acculturation and “rasquachismo” (the creative use of limited space) in order to survive the urban sprawl of Houston; charros riding their horses in the middle of downtown Houston, young mariachis playing in local supermarkets, auto detailers using the waiting rooms in shops as after school play rooms for their children, and flower shops turned into after hours dance-studios as safe havens for young teens. Within each panorama, I am able to present the chaos and order of the Mexican American community in an intimate and approachable presentation.”

**Tatiana Fiodorova** is an artist from the Republic of Moldova, a former Soviet state between the Ukraine and Romania. Fiodorova will be exhibiting two videos in *Transcultural Identities*, “I Go” and “Moldavian Land”. She is involved with the arts in her diverse roles as a fine artist, graphic designer and cultural administrator. She is keenly aware of the complexities faced by a young country in creating an inclusive and productive national identity. She says:

“As an artist from Moldova, I worry about everything that happens in my country. Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Moldova, as well as all post-Soviet countries who have abandoned the socialist concept of development, have been faced with the difficulties of transition. Today the Moldovan population is caught in the fuzzy area of `transit` from one order of life to another, while in the dark as to whether the developments will lead to something new, or that the “new” will turn out to be a “not yet forgotten” old Soviet dependence...”

**Priya Kambli** was born in India and moved to the United States at the age of 18. Kambli’s work is informed by this experience and her bicultural identity. She says that the process of creating the *Color Falls Down* series has helped her come to terms with some of the conflicts inherent in having ties to two cultures. She says:

“My photographs visually express the notion of transience and split cultural identity caused by the act of migration. Recently in my artwork I have been viewing this issue through the lens of my own personal history and cultural identity. My move from India to the United States 13 years ago left me feeling that I do not belong fully to either culture, leaving me unable to anchor myself in any particular cultural framework. This disconnection from both cultures has changed the way I perceive myself by forming a hybrid identity, a patching together of two cultures within one person. Photography has been a way of bridging the gap between the two cultures while coming to terms with my dual nature...”

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**Annu Palakunnathu Matthew's** series *The Virtual Immigrant* is also concerned with bicultural identity, in this case with the experience of call center workers in India. A selection of images from this series will be on view in *Transcultural Identities*. Matthew describes her concept:

“The Virtual Immigrant draws on the experience of call centers workers in India. These Virtual Immigrants become Americans for a workday but remain physically in India. To work in these call centers, Indians study American culture and either neutralize their Indian accents and/or adopt American ones. They virtually live between cultures without leaving their country of origin. The tangible markers of identity such as race, ethnicity, gender or class, are made more malleable and flexible for the virtual immigrant.\* The work portrays the constant fluidity of this new type of immigrant, relevant as we debate the gains and losses created by the effects of digital technology and globalization. The work explores the magnified cultural dislocation caused by technology's effect on collapsing borders and shrinking distances. The experience of being a Virtual Immigrant includes sometimes shedding their Indianess for the sometimes fictional values and similes of the American Dream that bombard them in daily life and as part of their training.”

Matthew currently lives in Rhode Island, where she is Professor of Art at the University of Rhode Island.

**Wendy Phillips** is an Atlanta-based artist and Georgia State University alumna. Phillips will exhibit work from her *La Limpia* series in *Transcultural Identities*. She explains her intentions:

“This work is based in my search for the beliefs, philosophies, and healing practices that may have been those of my ancestors. Written records of world history, as well as the oral histories of my ancestors, inform me of my West African and Native American (Iroquois) heritage. Unfortunately, the cultural and political climate in which my great-grandmothers lived did not encourage or permit the holding on to, practice, or expression of their traditional West African and North American indigenous beliefs and healing practices, and all but a few nuances of these were lost to me.

My research on the people of African and indigenous descent who live on the southern coast of Mexico has included oral history taking about traditional beliefs and ritual practices, and making black and white photographs, including portraiture and documentation of rituals and daily life in their communities. From the women there, I have learned about how a woman protects herself from negative spiritual influences in pregnancy and after the birth of her infant, rituals for energetic cleansing and the treatment of illness, and rites marking an individual's passage from this world into the next. Although the women do not identify themselves or know that they are of African descent, their rituals and practices seem to refer directly to Akan and Yoruba (African) practices. As I spent time with the Mexican women, learning about their traditions, I felt as if I had found the knowledge that my foremothers were unable to pass down to me.”

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**Sylvia de Swaan** was born in Romania and has lived and worked in Mexico, Europe, and the United States. Now living in Utica, New York, de Swaan will exhibit diptychs from her series *Return in Transcultural Identities*. She describes the series:

“Return is about memory and identity. It is a self-portrait and a journey, a quest for remnants of history erased by war. The irony in my title is that there is no return, or that my precise destination is not as obvious as it might seem. I come from a region known as the Bucovina, its former capital Czernowitz, which was once under Austria, then Romania, and now in the Ukraine. There are no family hearths to go back to there. I grew up identifying as Romanian, though my first language was German, and as a Jew I have a dark and frightening history to dredge up.

The leit-motifs in *Return* are images of trains and of my hand holding a small photo that was once affixed to my displaced persons papers, circa 1947. It is a journey in present time interspersed with self referential images - as it were, a series of flashbacks to counterpoint present reality. My aim is to explore my own history in the context of present social realities of the region, to examine the layers of identity that make up our being, and ponder the lines of destiny that propel us from one point to another.”

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