

CHICAGO

LAURA MOSQUERA

MONIQUE MELOCHE GALLERY, 951 W. FULTON ST., 60607 312/455-0299
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, 222 E. CHICAGO AVE., 60611 312/280-2660



DELIVERING A HARD-EDGED, NEO-POP JOLT. Laura Mosquera's figurative paintings place her in a tradition defined by artists such as Alex Katz and David Hockney. Like these artists who saw in their immediate worlds of the cultured, hip, and casual elite a rich subject to extend the dialogue of painting, Mosquera casts her own one-act dramas from the artistic community that surrounds her. The resulting paintings are visually cinematic—the cold, clinical voyeurism epitomized by the films of Stanley Kubrick crossed with the lush, metaphorical color and street choreography of Cinemascope musicals such as *West Side Story*. Mosquera creates tableaux of twenty-first-century, upper-middle-class alienation, recreating the palpable physical and social inertia of gallery openings where people search for familiar faces across clusters of semi-turned, anonymous bodies. Her protagonists exude an external coolness through their garishly patterned, retro '70s clothing and casual stances. Yet the self-assuredness of these figures is not all that it initially appears to be. People are often grouped together in twos and threes, but nonetheless appear psychologically isolated. This quality is emphasized by the large expanses of abstract designs that serve as the ground plane for her standing and seated figures. Formally separating and linking figures from background to foreground, these sweeping arcs and cocktail-lounge-inspired geometries define the social arena as a void of ambiguities.

Mosquera successfully recreates the awkward feeling of social gatherings where one warily sizes up fellow guests from across the room based on the coded signals of body language, physical attraction, and style of dress. Through the postures of her figures, Mosquera conveys the personal purgatory of those seeking social acceptance in an often shallow world where who is "in" or "out" can be defined by the most subtle nod or gesture. Her people are in a perpetual limbo of reevaluating their own social status, to little visible resolution. Their loud clothing—striped pants, jungle-print skirts, and madras jackets, to name only a few of Mosquera's Op Art referential fashions—act as an exaggerated external compensation for their seeming inability to achieve an intimate and emotionally fulfilling exchange. Heightening these individuals' social awkwardness are their contraposto poses so effectively cap-

tured by Mosquera's strong drawing skills. Through the slouches of bent knees and nonchalant waist turns one sees the contemporary bastardization of classical Greek sculpture, as filtered through the fashion poses endlessly replicated in mainstream entertainment media. Mosquera's images suggest that one's posture can be worn as much as one's particular choice of fashion: How you stand says as much about where you come from as who you want to transform yourself into.

Mosquera's wall painting at the Museum of Contemporary Art, *Interesting Things Will Begin to Develop*, implies through its floor-to-ceiling scale a promise that the viewer can have a stronger physical, and thus psychological, interaction with the artist's worlds. One seemingly should be able to immerse oneself in the psychedelic environment of swirling ribbons of saturated color and tragically hip people. Yet, while it is an accomplished example of Mosquera's complex compositional integration of pattern and human gesture, the work appears forced into a scale that subtly undermines the successful proportions of her other paintings. By contrast, the successful panoramic canvases at Monique Meloche Gallery, while large in scale, are just slightly smaller than life-size, which separates the images from reality despite their fastidious attention to detail. As a result, the compositions remain contained, echoing the letterbox format of a movie screen and thus making one aware of the invisible barriers that surround people in their privately constructed worlds of artifice.

Mosquera's painfully quiet, small-scale pencil drawings that were on display in both exhibitions reveal an unexpected and additional dimension to her work. The drawings surprisingly and quite effectively substitute the intense color of the paintings with the stark whiteness of drawing paper, as well as with the subtle tonal values of judiciously selected areas of pattern. The images rely heavily on Mosquera's skill at using contour line to transform blank areas of paper into the bare flesh of faces, arms, and legs. Her figures seem always on the verge of disappearing into the enveloping, blinding whiteness of their grounds. Through the silvery tones of these understated surfaces, Mosquera conjures images of human chameleons shedding their skins to adapt to their desired environments.

John Brunetti is a critic and the Illinois editor of dialogue.

LAURA MOSQUERA

There's Something About to Happen Again, 2001. Latex, acrylic, enamel, and glitter glue on muslin, 72" x 108".