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LAS CASITAS REVISITED

An Urban Cultural Alternative

Opens at Longwood Art Gallery @ Hostos on October 6, 2010

Exhibit Highlights

Dates: **October 6 – December 11, 2010**

Gallery Hours: **Monday - Saturday 10:00am-6:00pm**

Location: **Longwood Art Gallery @ Hostos**

450 Grand Concourse @ 149 Street, Bronx

Organized by: **The Bronx Council on the Arts &**

Hostos Center for Arts and Culture

Opening Gala: Wednesday, October 6, 5:00-9:00pm

Festivities include:

Bomba Dance Workshop and the Bronx Culture Trolley

Closing Reception: Bronx Culture Trolley

Wednesday, December 1, 2010 5:00-9:00pm

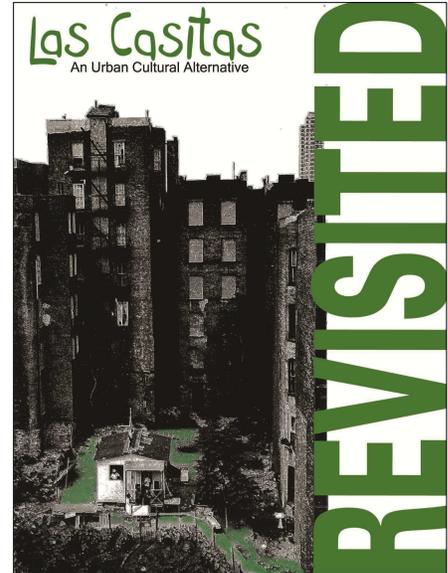


Photo: Martha Cooper

The Bronx Council on the Arts (BCA) and The Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture present, ***Las Casitas Revisited***, a reconstruction and update of the legendary exhibit, ***Las Casitas: An Urban Cultural Alternative***, on Wednesday,

October 6, 2010, 5:00 to 9:00pm in the Longwood Art Gallery at Hostos Community College, 450 Grand Concourse at 149th Street. The opening will be in conjunction with the Bronx Culture Trolley and the BomPlenazo 2010 Festival, and will feature a **Bomba dance workshop** at the Hostos Memorial Garden from 5:30pm to 7:00pm. In the event of inclement weather the workshop will take place in the Hostos Dance Studio.

BCA's original exhibition, ***Las Casitas: An Urban Cultural Alternative***, opened at the Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C. in 1991 and focused on the phenomenon of the proliferation of *casitas* -- a type of architecture introduced into Puerto Rican working class neighborhoods in the mid-20th century -- and found in empty lots throughout New York City, especially in the South Bronx, Lower East Side and East Harlem.

Still common throughout the city, *casitas* function, not as homes, but as informal community centers for people to gather, garden and most importantly dance, sing and play *bomba* and *plena*. These African-rooted music and dance traditions remain living, breathing and growing expressions of the island and in Diaspora communities.

continued on page 2...

2 – Las Casitas Revisited – 2

Las Casitas Revisited brings together elements of the original exhibition, including photographs by the renowned photographer Martha Cooper. It includes photographs, found objects, video footage and musical instruments that reflect the history of one of the best known casitas, the beloved **Casita de Chema** (formerly called Rincon Criollo). This exemplary casita, which has been in operation for over 30 years, is an important catalyst and incubator of Puerto Rican culture in New York City. The centerpiece of the installation is a reproduction of a portion of **Casita de Chema** designed and installed by José “Chema” Soto, the casita’s founder and Juan Fernando Morales, the exhibition’s designer.

The exhibition is organized by William Aguado, president of the Bronx Council on the Arts, Wallace Edgecombe, director of the Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture, and Juanita Lanzo, curator of the Longwood Art Gallery @ Hostos. It is an assemblage of works including video footage and still images of community jams and pig roasts held at the Casita (now at 157th Street and St. Ann’s Avenue) since the original exhibition twenty years ago. Other elements of the show include a display of percussion instruments, found objects and memorabilia, including fences, masonry, historical posters and crafts.

The installation will be one of the principal components of the Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture’s **BomPlenazo** 2010 Festival, a biennial celebration of Afro-Puerto Rican culture, which this year will focus on cultural traditions from the area of Mayagüez on the west coast of Puerto Rico. For information on the BomPlenazo festival, visit www.hostos.cuny.edu/culturearts.

“Like so many other casitas throughout New York City, **Las Casita de Chema** endured the precipitous decline of the surrounding South Bronx community in the 1970s. In fact, Mr. Soto and his friends constructed it just as the community reached its nadir and they defiantly held on through fires and abandonment, transforming the empty lot on which it was constructed into an oasis in the midst of profound blight,” says Aguado of this revamped show.

In addition to serving as an important incubator of Puerto Rican culture, *casitas* are one of the most successful examples of the City’s urban greening and continue to gain unparalleled notoriety among practitioners of the *bomba* and *plena* traditions. Perhaps a casita’s greatest contribution to the cultural life of New York City, however, is its role as a center for new talent and cultural expressions.

This exhibition was made possible with funding from New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, the Scherman Foundation, and Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo.

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