

9/16/2009

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## Cultural imperatives



COURTESY PHOTO

"Untitled," by Leo Matiz (Xochimilco, Mexico, 1945)

Get 'em while they're hot

ADD THIS

BY ENRIQUE LOPETEGUI

Mexico, de novo

The life of photographer, caricaturist, and adventurer Leo Matiz (1917-1998), unarguably Colombia's greatest photographer of the 20th century, was in itself worth capturing on film. A photojournalist almost by accident, he is revered in Venezuela (where he lived from 1954-64, as documented in the *Leo Matiz en Caracas* short); was named one of the world's 10 best photographers in 1949; organized Fernando Botero's first Colombian exhibit; and hung with and photographed Frida Kahlo and other Mexican greats in the '40s.

But the photos, and the photos alone, are the reason no one should miss the stunning exhibit *The Mexico of Leo Matiz*, curated by Luis Martín Lozano at the Instituto de México for FotoSeptiembre 2009. Lozano presents a breathtaking collection of 40 black-and-white

photographs that, in his words, "captures the essence of Mexico: the diversity and dignity of its people, the love for the land and work, and the talent and creativity of its artists."

Images of anonymous rural heroes like the "Mexican Quixote" are as powerful as candid shots of composer Agustín Lara, of muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, and of cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa (all legendary masters in their respective arenas); they present a beauty and power of such magnitude that one feels immersed in the world of Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950), shot, not surprisingly, shortly after Matiz took these photographs. [And screening, incidentally, at Main Plaza this week; see page 32.] And yes, there is Frida, but you've got to see for yourself.

The other exhibits being hosted by the Instituto this month include the SAY Sí alumni-produced *The Way I Sí It* (curated by Guillermina Zabala, this writer's wife), and two exhibits curated by FotoSeptiembreUSA founder Michael Mehl: *The Mini Series II* (featuring small photographs by artists from Brazil, California, France, Germany, and Switzerland) and *Nuevo León: Imágenes de nuestra memoria* (Nuevo León: Images from our memory).

The latter, based on 30 period photos taken from Nuevo León's Fototeca archives, are a perfect complement to Matiz's work. These are not just "old photos from Mexico"; it seems Mehl was extra careful to make sure the viewer knows the names and details of the subjects we are looking at — a simple shot of a seated child from the early 1900s takes on a whole different dimension when you read that he's "The Telepathic Boy." Even if it's just a name, a place, and a year, the information on most of the shots (which possess that magical beauty seldom seen in digital photography) makes us care about and feel that we know these characters. Call me old-fashioned, but it is refreshing to see exhibits where the curators demonstrate more concerns than just framing and hanging.

### Action Philosophers!

The über-talented Overtime Crew swings from Bodhidharma to Marx in this (yes) thrilling adaptation of the comic-book series, which makes fun with Ayn Rand and John Stuart Mill without making light of their ideas. [See "Plato, live! at the Overtime," August 26.] \$9-\$12. *Through September 19, the Overtime Theater, theovertimetheater.net*

### The History Boys

A moving and faithful adaptation of Alan Bennett's Tony-winning drama about knowledge, identity, and cultural values, set among the competing hormones and egos of a British prep

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If your MOM could cook like this...

The Law Critics of JAMIE BALAGIA CRIMINAL TRIAL ATTORNEYS

school. In the role of Hector, Don Frame is as comfortable as the old leather jacket that symbolizes his free-wheeling methods both in and out of the classroom. Fresh from college both in role and real life, Mark McCarver anchors the ensemble as Irwin, the progressive new professor who challenges both Hector and the boys to rethink their idea of history. Directed by AtticRep co-founder Tim Hedgepeth. [See "Time in a bottle," September 2.] \$13-\$23. *Through September 27, the Cellar at the San Pedro Playhouse, sanpedroplayhouse.com*

### Psycho Beach Party

The Cameo pulls off a flawless and frenetic rendition of Charles Busch's gay send-up of those inane Frankie and Annette beach flicks. Of particular joy: Gregory Hinojosa's amazing turn as Chicklet's deranged mother (call ahead; he's out for a few performances later in the run.) If you're a fan of campy theater, you'd be psycho not to go. [See "Sun scream," August 26.] \$15. *Through October 3, Zumbro Lounge @ the Cameo Theatre, cameotheatre.org*

### Leigh Anne Lester

Leigh Anne Lester's lovely illustrations of unnatural monstrosities are the art equivalent of a Venus Flytrap. Delicate flowers grafted to wicked-looking cacti capture you in a sticky conundrum: Is human meddling with DNA our greatest scientific achievement or a Vonnegut-penned epitaph? Lester doesn't pretend to know, either, but she worries. More importantly for the insidious appeal of her work, progress gone wrong possesses its own terrible beauty. [See "Growth spurt," July 10.] *Free. Through October 25, the Institute of Texan Cultures, texancultures.utsa.edu, (210) 458-2300*



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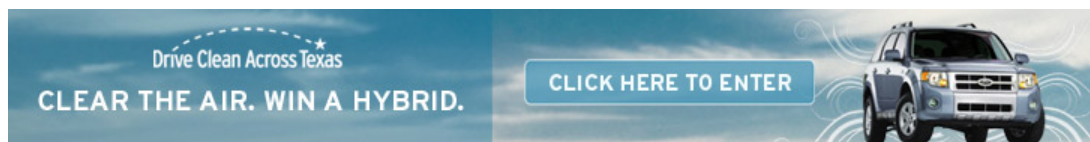
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