

■ TRENDsetters

The Other Side of Paradise

Using
collage,
video, and
seawater
ice
cream,

Quisqueya
Henríquez
deflates



Caribbean stereotypes with
a sharp wit

For a recent series of collages she composed from newspaper clippings, Quisqueya Henríquez constructed pictures of baseball players sprouting supermuscular arms and extra appendages made of balls and helmets. These Frankenstein-like images, more absurd than horrific, poke fun at the image of the

hypersexualized sports machine often associated with Dominican men who come to the United States to play ball. Throughout her work, Henríquez wittily skewers preconceptions about Latin Americans. “There are so many stereotypes about Caribbean people: hot-blooded, passionate, not thinkers,” says Henríquez, who speaks rapidly and invokes literary influences from John Cheever to

José Saramago as readily as she does art-historical ones. “But I was educated for thinking; that’s one of my passions about art.”

The 40-year-old artist, whose first solo museum survey opens at the Bronx Museum of Arts on the 16th of this month, spent more than a decade crisscrossing the Caribbean in pursuit of that education. Born in Cuba and raised in the Dominican Republic, Henríquez returned to Havana when she was 20 to learn painting at the Instituto Superior de Arte. There her studies concentrated on Minimalism and *arte povera*. After graduation she lived in Mexico for several years, where her at-



ABOVE *Untitled (Baseball Players)*, 2007. **BELOW** *Goggles tint the Caribbean scenery in *Paraíso de la verdura (Paradise of Greenness)**, 2002–6.

to draw us in,” says Brooklyn Museum assistant curator Tumelo Mosaka. “We recognize the image or the object, but once we’re in it we realize that it’s been shifted. And that shifting makes us think more about where we’re coming from.”

That approach is evident in several photographic diptychs, titled *Paraíso de la verdura (Paradise of Greenness)*, 2002–6, which Mosaka selected for “Infinite

Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art,” on view through January 27. The pairings have been shot through goggles. In one piece, the right lens shows two empty chairs facing the ocean—as in an advertisement for an idyllic Caribbean vacation—while the left offers a dingy view with a tin-roofed shack standing before the sea.

In another pairing, one lens shows a calm ocean with a ship—an oil tanker?—on the horizon; the other, a horse carcass among lush greenery. Mosaka says such juxtapositions force viewers to ask, “Is this really a paradise I’m looking at?”

A more offbeat challenge to common prejudices is Hen-



tention turned to photography. Then, during four years in Miami, she shifted her focus from making all-white Post-Minimalist sculpture to creating topical work that addresses issues like colonialism and stereotyping. Though she returned to Santo Domingo in 1999 to be closer to her family, she says she considers Miami her “art home.” It’s the location of her gallery, David Castillo, where she will show recent sculpture, video, and installation work in November.

Henríquez’s diverse body of work is united by her interest in familiar and seemingly banal imagery. “She uses everyday objects that we feel comfortable confronting and engaging with

riquez’s *Helado de Agua de Mar Caribe (Caribbean Seawater Ice Cream)*, 2002), fabricated with the help of a chemical engineer, who adjusted the levels of fat, salt, and bacteria in the seawater. The rich, salty, cyan-colored dessert, first made for Art Chicago’s 2002 “Metropolis” exhibition, will be served to visitors at Henríquez’s solo show at the Bronx Museum. Using ice cream, Henríquez explains, enables her to playfully challenge preconceptions—that seawater cannot be frozen, that dessert is sweet, and, by extension, that Caribbean people are one way or another. “What you expect,” the artist observes, “is not always what is there.”

—Rachel Somerstein