



Pepón Osorio, *La Cama (The Bed)*, 1987, mixed-media installation with bed. El Museo del Barrio.

Pepón Osorio

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

Willful and whimsical, lyrical and tragic, Puerto Rican-born Pepón Osorio's objects and installations pulsed with energy and feeling. The show's title, "Con Tó' Los Hierros" (loosely translated as "going for broke"), described his political focus and the sensory overload the pieces produced. Osorio's intelligence and formal acumen shaped this exuberance into works that often glittered on the outside but brooded at their cores.

The retrospective started in 1985, when Osorio's artistic vocabulary began to change in response to performances he created (and continues to create) with his wife, choreographer Merian Soto. This theatrical bent enhanced the objects but hurt some of the installations. In *The Bicycle*, designed for the performance piece *Cooking*, Osorio transformed a bicycle by dipping it into a bath of Latin American pop culture. Under the weight of decals, plastic flowers, and miniature palm trees, the machine disappeared and a personality emerged.

For *Between Skin and Flesh* Osorio staggered around a room several artificial ficus trees bearing white scrawls on their leaves. With only the subdued lettering for embellishment, the trees didn't metamorphose the way *The Bicycle* did, making the installation seem more like a set. Osorio fared

better where he was less literal and more detailed.

The ultra-Baroque ornament in *The Bicycle* worked best in Osorio's strongest piece, *The Bed*. In a room of gilt and peach, a four-poster turned into a kind of actress whose lines appeared along the baseboard of the mock bedroom. Covered with commemorative ribbons on the spread, with more baubles on the frame, the bed told the story of the artist's nanny, Juana, and also alluded to the artist's life and that of his wife. Here Osorio condensed three lives and the stages of birth, marriage, and death into one environment. As the visual dazzle abated, the piece's emotional depth began to register and stayed with the viewer.

—Hovey Brock