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Las Twines, Pepón Osorio

The Latino identity is increasingly becoming a subject of discussion within both the Latino community and the arts-at-large. While it's common to hear questions raised about the role of the racial make-up of the populace of Brazil or Cuba, it is rarer to find an open and frank discussion about the racial origins of the Puerto Rican people, especially of those residing in the 50 states of the USA and the District of Columbia. In order to open a dialogue on the matter, Pepón Osorio has created a gently provocative installation piece, titled *Las Twines*.

In *Las Twines*, or *The Twin Girls*, Osorio addresses the co-existence of the Spanish colonialist, African slave, and native Boricua bloodlines within the Puerto Rican population. At the center of the work is a pair of mannequins of young twin girls, who appear to be identical in all features

except for skin color; one is fair-skinned, and the other is dark-skinned. They are dressed as parade princesses and seated in the type of car which tends to appear in cultural pride parades in New York City. On the periphery of the installation, there are three projection videos, each depicting a close-up view of a man washing his face with water and, as a result, transforming his skin color from light to dark and back and his features from "African" to "European" and back. The third component of *Las Twines* consists of bundles of festive mylar balloons with imprinted phrases commenting on racial origin.

Osorio generally presents each of his works initially within a local community venue and, afterwards, within an institutional art exhibition facility. In mid-August, he installed *Las Twines* in a storefront space in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx, an area which Osorio has noted is not only 79% Latino and 18% African-American but also 41% under the age

of 19. By bringing this work to a neighborhood populated by so many young children and teenagers, Osorio demonstrates how an artist can support the initiatives of community-based, youth-oriented social service and educational programs, such as, respectively, *Unitas* and *Pepatian*.

Las Twines will travel to the Hostos Center for Arts & Culture in late October. It is difficult to say whether or how the work will seem to be re-contextualized in a university environment. However, it will be interesting to see if or how the student community will be impacted by this refreshing and mildly controversial work.

--Lawrence Nassau

Las Twines, Pepón Osorio
August 10 -15, 1998
Las Twines Storefront,
886 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York

October 21, 1998
The Hostos Center for Arts & Culture, Eugenio María de Hostos Community College,
450 Grand Concourse, Bronx, New York.
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