



Arturo Vega Retrospective Gives Ramones' Logo Designer His Due

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

Best known for creating the [Ramones' iconic logo](#), Arturo Vega created a vast body of artwork over a span of five decades that has rarely been seen. A breakthrough on this front has come to pass in the form of a retrospective at the [Bob Rauschenberg Gallery](#) on the campus of Florida SouthWestern College in Fort Myers, Florida. On viewing from November 4 through December 17, 2016, the survey is the late Mexican-born artist's first solo U.S. museum retrospective.

Non-stop international touring with the band as their lighting designer and merchandise manager allowed Arturo Vega to exhibit his art at galleries only a handful of times during his life. Since Vega's death from cancer in 2013, a Foundation has been established in his name in New York City to ensure that his work is exhibited and to establish his place in the fine art world.



"Empire: An Arturo Vega Retrospective" at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern College.

Earlier this year, Vega's graphic art was exhibited as part of the Ramones retrospective, "[Hey! Ho! Let's Go: Ramones and the Birth of Punk](#)" at the [Queens Museum](#). Click [here](#) to read about the exhibition and the making of Vega's famous Ramones logo.

"Empire: An Arturo Vega Retrospective" features photography, collage and a number of iconic canvases. Included are works from the artist's "Department of Commerce," "Supermarket" and "Silver Dollar" series begun in the 1970s; and "Flags" and "Word Paintings" from the "Insults" series. There are large-scale commissioned pieces and the final work Vega created, a public mural he painted that was on view on Elizabeth Street in Manhattan.

The show is curated by Jane Friedman and Ted Riederer, both of [Howl! Happening: An Arturo Vega Project](#), and [Bob Rauschenberg Gallery](#) Director Jade Dellinger.

Influenced by New York street art—newspaper headlines, grocery store signs, even slurs he heard on the street—Vega straddled the last gasps of late '60s Pop art and the early rumblings of the Pictures Generation. Using [Warhol's](#) silkscreen methods and appropriated found images, he forged his art aesthetic from a bold look, primary color palette and a fascination with the power of words.



Artwork by Arturo Vega on view at “Empire: An Arturo Vega Retrospective” at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern College.



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While working on his first painting series of supermarket signs in 1976, Vega befriended members of the Ramones, a rock and roll band that would soon play their first show (and would decades later be inducted into the [Rock & Roll Hall of Fame](#)). In his creation of the Ramones’ logo based on the Great Seal of the United States, painting backdrops and designing the lighting for their live performances loosely adapted from Albert Speer’s [Lichtdom](#), Vega created visual imagery, according to the Rauschenberg Gallery website, “that defined the transgressive aesthetic of punk rock by co-opting and questioning symbols of power.”

In addition to a number of group shows since the 1970s, Vega’s work has been the subject of one-person exhibitions at CB’s 313 Gallery/New York City (1992); Raleigh Studios/Miami Beach (1994); Galería OMR/México, D.F. (2011), Casa Redonda, Chihuahua/Mexico (2012); and at How! Happening/New York City (2015, 2016).

I worked with Vega when curating his 1994 exhibition in Miami Beach.

For his bio, Vega wrote: “Art is everywhere but there is never enough Art. Art has stopped being a chronologically correct string of schools and isms and is being born all the time, everywhere; Art connects to the eternal—demanding fast changes and a reckless appetite for truth, justice and a better way of life.”

“I want my art to look clean and clear, and like light rays to be loaded with a vast spectrum of meaning,” he continued. “I want it to be direct and instantly engaging and above all I don’t want my paintings to carry any waste; my ideal painting should be in its form and context 1000% just and necessary. Art is the better way of doing things.”

BASIC FACTS: “Empire: An Arturo Vega Retrospective” is on view November 4 through December 17, 2016 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Pkwy SW, Building L, Fort Myers, Florida 33919. www.RauschenbergGallery.com

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