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From Mexico, an hour of New York City minutes

BY STEVE DOLLAR

Working with themes of identity, tradition and cultural symbolism, Mexican artist Carlos Amorales has made a name for himself as a performance artist — the kind who works at the boundaries of politics, pop culture and subversive entertainment.

He's admired for creating a series of works that reference the grand Mexican tradition of *Lucha Libre*: *mano a mano* struggle between burly wrestlers in lurid masks that render them as superheroes or demonic forces. That iconography abides in Amorales' latest work: Stepping up to animated video for the first time, he created a piece called "The Forest."

The hour-long video is being shown 60 seconds at a time on the NBC Astrovision by Panasonic screen in Times Square as part of the "59th Minute" program curated by Creative Time, the public-art nonprofit organization. Running through Jan. 31, the clips air on the final minute of each hour (with some daily exceptions).

Since Amorales uses high-contrast black-and-white to create silhouette-like images, his work jumps more boldly than many previous installations at the site, which is surrounded by the nonstop pulsing of neon signage and advertising.

His wrestler is one of the stars of "The Forest," materializing as a character in a long

dream sequence, multiplying, dancing wildly with menacing intent. Figures shift their shapes throughout, as if occupying the subconscious imagination: A flock of black birds fills a desolate, spooky forest; a woman shakes as if in a frenzy; an airplane gradually descends from the sky. There's a lot of ambiguity at work.

"The experience of having lived outside the culture in which I grew up [Mexican], created the need to redefine my identity in accordance to the idiosyncrasy of other cultures," he says. "My work became, and is, an effort to understand how the physical and psychological confrontation between the self and the other constructs our social image and identity. In actuality, what fascinates me in this direct confrontation is the tension between aggression and affection — as it is apparent in many, if not all, human expressions."

To see "The Forest," stand on the traffic island at the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue at 45th Street, face south and look up. The video runs for one minute on the last minute of every hour (except between 7 and 10 a.m. and 6 and 7 p.m.). For more information, call 212-206-6674, or visit www.creativetime.org.

Swab story

He inspired generations of children to eat their spinach, and anticipated Eminem's lyrics by decades when he declared: "I yam what I yam." Still muscle-bound and mythic in his eighth decade, Popeye gets the pop eye in a new exhibit at the Museum of Television & Radio.

"Well, Blow Me Down: 75 Years of Popeye" traces the

long and storied career of a quintessential American icon — a sailor who has navigated various media, from the comic strip that birthed him in 1929 ("Thimble Theatre"), to his own full-on strip, to the celebrated animation of Max Fleischer in the 1930s and '40s, onto later incarnations that included Robert Altman's live-action "Popeye" movie (with the inimitable Robin Williams), a postage stamp and now, 3-D CGI. The new "Popeye's Voyage: The Quest for Pappy" animated feature airs next month on Fox.

"He's been out of circulation for a while," says Barry Monush, a researcher at the museum, while noting Popeye's enduring appeal. "He's just a great heroic character. I always equate him with battling Bluto, like battling the schoolyard bully. Bluto would cause trouble, Popeye would take it as long as he could. Bluto would take it too far, so Popeye popped open a can of spinach and beat the daylight out of him."

Along with Bluto, Popeye's brutish nemesis, a classic love triangle was made complete with Olive Oyl, the hero's willowy girlfriend and Bluto's unrequited object of desire. Another character, the portly Wimpy, supplied comic relief, always trying to scam a meal and immortalizing the line: "I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." Little wonder his name inspired a

British fast-food franchise. (Popeye, forever associated with — bleah! — canned spinach, got his own tribute: A statue of the character stands tall in Crystal City, Texas, "Spinach Capital of the World.")

Something must have clicked. When TV Guide selected the top 50 animated characters of all time, only Popeye, Mickey Mouse and Felix the Cat qualified among the earliest American cartoon creatures. Created by E.C. (Eltzie Crisler) Segar, Popeye never knew the merchandising empire that Mickey claimed,

nor won the latter-day hipster adulation of Felix the Cat. He yam what he yam, after all: an old salt, robust and unrefined.

The exhibit runs through Jan. 30. The museum is at 25 W. 52nd St, Manhattan. Open Tuesdays-Sundays, noon-6 p.m. (8 p.m. on Thursdays); \$10. For more information, call 212-621-6800, or visit www.mtr.org.



PHOTO BY CHARLIE SAMUELS

Artist Carlos Amorales' video, "The Forest," is being shown on the large TV screen in Times Square as part of Creative Times' "59th Minute" program.