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Sarabia's Work Subverts Prettily

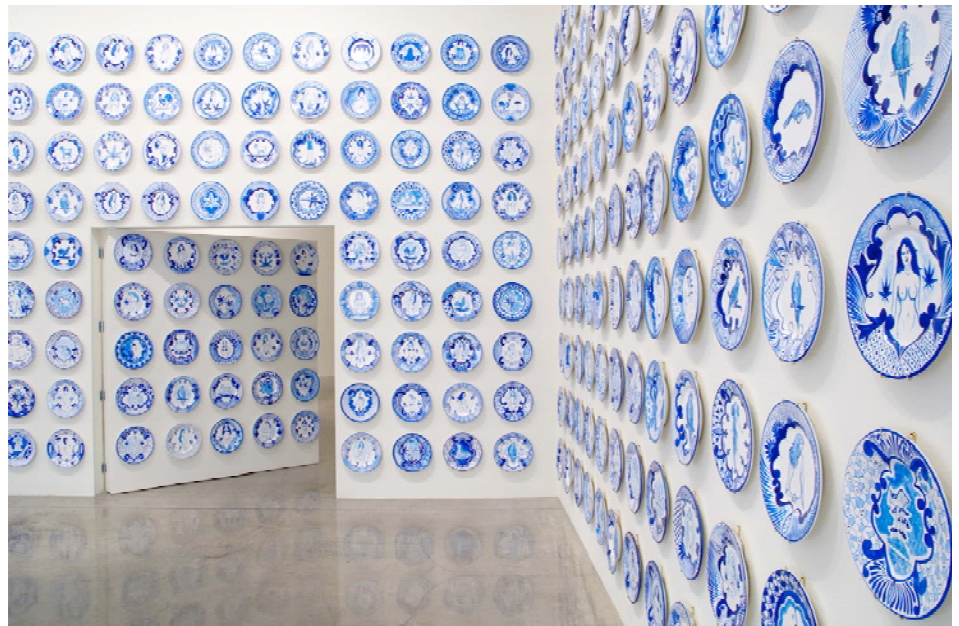
By Leah Ollman

Special to the Times

The history of the world, according to Eduardo Sarabia's dastardly decorative work, is a tale of sex, drugs and violence, told in the language of commerce. Tough stuff, but Sarabia soft-sells it, making it pretty and palatable. His mild-mannered subversion goes down easily.

The centerpiece of Sarabia's show at L.A. Louver reads a bit like a showroom. More than 600 unique, hand-painted ceramic plates are mounted floor to ceiling, wall to wall, an attractive and impressive display of merchandise. The installation (titled, like the show, "History of the World") renders ornamental the currency of the black market -- guns, marijuana and other drugs -- and other commodified, animate beings, such as parrots, roosters, goats and especially nearly nude women in alluring poses. Each subject is framed by foliate or geometric patterns painted in blue enamel. Mexican artisan pottery comes to mind, as does Dutch Delftware.

Sarabia, who divides his time among Guadalajara, Berlin and his native L.A., champions hybridity. A few oils on canvas in the show force together snapshot-derived realism and sloppy abstraction, yielding odes to irretrievable memories. Another installation stacks more painted pottery (bowls, pots, vases) on a shelving unit, as if it's inventory ready for sale or shipping.



The work is too well behaved to generate any serious friction, but its fusion of the knowing and the naive, the playful and the critical, does boost the cause of the aesthetic mixed marriage. What is most interesting about Sarabia's work is its unlikeliness -- as if he's smuggling in plain sight.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through Augus 23. www.lalouver.com.