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**Frank Romero: "Dreamland" at Museum of Latin American Art
LONG BEACH, CA**

By Liz Goldner

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"The Closing of Whittier Blvd.," 1984, Frank Romero, Oil on canvas, 72" x 120." On loan from AltaMed Art Collection. Photo: courtesy Cástulo de la Rocha and Zoila D. Escobar

While this exhibition surveys LA's pop and social iconography from the past 40 years, the pieces that stand out, that address our city's ever-evolving history, are the artist's politically themed paintings. One of Frank Romero's most renowned works, *Death of Rubén Salazar* (1986), is a large oil (from the Smithsonian American Art Museum) depicting East LA's Silver Dollar Café. This illustration of the site and scenario of civil rights journalist Salazar's 1970 killing, during a raid by a SWAT team, commemorates LA's volatile activist history. Romero, while an admirer of Latino journalist Salazar, expressed his own political ideals in the 1970s and '80s, mainly through artistic movements. These included the "Los Four" artist collective, of which he was a member, which helped bring Latino art to LACMA in 1974, and "Asco," the more low-key East LA Chicano performance/conceptual art group. Another Romero work visually recounting social injustice is *The Closing of Whittier Blvd.* (1984). This dark-toned painting features six sheriffs behind barriers and another sheriff on horseback, holding an old-fashioned spear, blocking the passage of all vehicular traffic. Other history paintings include *Teatro Campesino* (1986), a depiction of a theatrical performance of a farm worker and his wife, hands up, inspired by the acting group of the same name; and *MacArthur Park, the Arrest of the Taco Wagon, an Attack on Culture* (2010), with a lush Los Angeles as a backdrop.

Comprised of more than 200 pieces portraying the sweep of Los Angeles life and environs over several decades, this exhibition includes murals, paintings of various sizes, mixed-media works, several with neon, and ceramic sculpture, filling up every museum gallery. Here also are boulevards, freeways, overpasses, hills, '60s-era sedans and convertibles, mariachi bands, skeletons, nudes and gothic houses, many pieces painted in bright primary and softer pastel colors. Styles include primitive two-dimensional to three-dimensional, and some show influence of Matisse's and Picasso's techniques, thanks to Romero's academic training at Otis College as a teenager and later at Cal State LA. Another poignant artwork is the serigraph *Freeway Wars* (1987) with its two sedans with backseat passengers shooting at each other. Mythical scenes are also here; *The Ghost of Evergreen Cemetery* (1987) features a black and a white ghost flying over a streetcar, small industrial buildings and a city cemetery, all incongruously adjoining each other at an intersection.