

The Raza Group: A bark as bad as their bite

by Sean Moore

In 1988, a group of local artists converged in a small Mexican ghetto known as *Raza*. Each one of them came from different backgrounds and each one brought with them their own experiences, views and skills.

Amidst the packs of wild dogs, piles of garbage and the scornful glances, **Scott MacLeod, Francis Caprani and Gerry Pedros** came together to form *The Raza Group*. Known for their hyper-political paintings that once adorned walls from the former St. Laurent bar, Hells Kitchen to warehouse structures in Dublin, Germany and Mexico, I had a chance to sit down and talk. No big whoop!

Upon meeting with Scott MacLeod and Francis Caprani one bleak afternoon inside a local pub, I immediately began to anticipate my decision to parlez with the group's two Quebec residents.

Frank Caprani sat huddled around his pint of Guinness, clean-shaven save a wild shock of hair flowing from the back of his skull. He sat scowling with a roll-your-own smoking between his tightly clenched jaws. Closer still, but recessed into the shadows loomed his youthful counterpart, Scott MacLeod. I felt nervous and a little put off by their inside humour, but that quickly dissipated.

Link: What incident(s) consolidated The Raza Group?:

Raza: Well I had met Francis through a teacher I had at Concordia, Gerry Pedros, the third member of the group. He was my lithography teacher and he really piqued my interest. Even though his class was a litho class, Gerry still wanted to see our work from before...unrelated works from our past. It was great, he took a real interest in his students. He ended up inviting me down to his studio a few times. This is where I met Francis, who was Gerry's partner at the time...shortly after that, I received a grant from the government and took off to the Banff Center of Fine Arts. Even though I was no longer in the same city as them, we still kept in touch with each other. Eventually I was invited to participate in an exchange program with Gerry and Francis. That's how we arrived in Mexico. Well Raza, to be exact...hence the name.

L: Is there a story behind the name of group?:

R: La Raza is as you already know, the slum in which we stayed. The actual word "Raza", translates into the first race, or the first Indian race. As for our logo...We wanted to use

something that was symbolic of where we were. Because of the rampant infestation of wild dogs, that we became used to seeing day after day, ...We decided to use it in our logo.

L: What is The Raza Groups prime directive?:

R: Well, what we try to do with the group is create an open forum between La Raza's members and the viewing public at large.

L: Why did the artists within the group decide to be "that"? Why did you decide to work as a group?:

R: Just because we work well as a group doesn't mean that our individual work is eliminated completely. As a group, we have the ability to explore more creative avenues. We are also privy to a lot more constructive criticism. It's like the old adage...Four heads are better than one.

L: How does working in such close proximity with each other effect your final works?:

R: We feed off of each others energy and exuberance. At one point a large number of our works had a decidedly Celtic slant to it. Probably due in part to Franks Irish roots that he brought with him from Dublin and the fact that I was raised by an Irish family. It's not uncommon for you to look at a piece that is signed by.....Frank or Gerry, and right there in the center of the work will be a portion form one of the members works. Appropriation.

L: You had mentioned something about how your work, at one point had a distinct Celtic quality to it. What happened to that quality or have you just put it on the backburner for now?:

R: Well, like I said, ...When I was younger, music played a big part in my creative process, and at the time I was listening to a lot of Irish bands and what not. Plus, having met

Francis, who at one time was an angry, fiery rabble-rouser...this led to an explosive, highly charged atmosphere. Not to mention political.

L: Both Scott and Frank were once Concordia Fine Arts students, while Gerry was a Concordia professor. What words of wisdom can draw from your depths on the topic of school and art?:

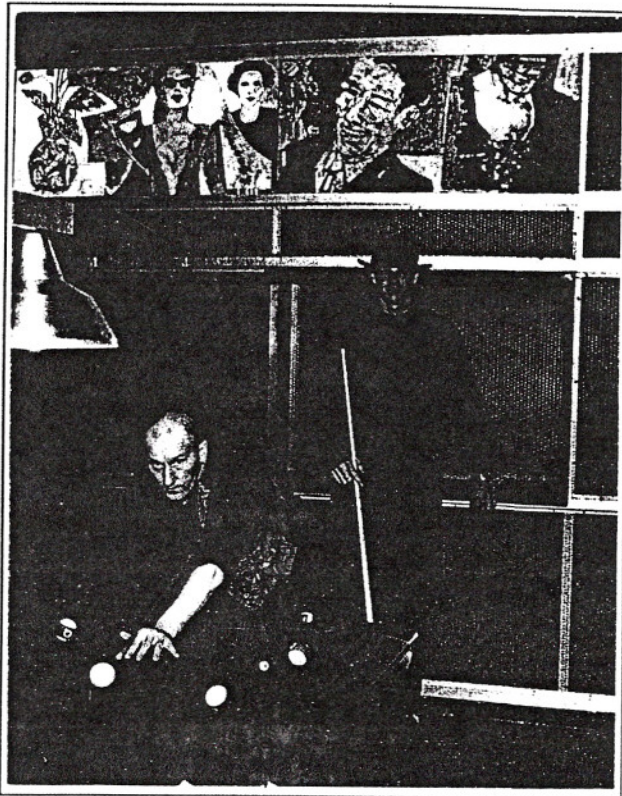
R: Academics can only bring you so far. Some people go to school because they don't know what else to do with themselves. Others go to school because they need someone to stand over them and hand out assignments. You can get technical knowledge or history, but the only thing that really matters is conviction. You reach a point in school when you've absorbed all you can from an institution. At that point, you stagnate or move on. It's all a personal journey.

L: Did the end of your academic career coincide with the beginning of The Raza Group?:

R: Yeah! Well, in a sense yeah. Definitely, we had all reached a point at which we broke off and did our own thing. I realized it was time when I just got sick of going in and what I was doing at home. The moment I started doing my work on my own was when I realized it was time.

L: Do you have any advice for artists either in school or out.

R: Have conviction. Believe in yourself. Egos are good to have, especially if you deserve one and don't expect anything from anyone.



Francis Caprani and Scott MacLeod shoot stick while their works look on.

No one owes you shit and no one gives a fuck whether you sink or swim. Do it for yourself.

The Raza Group does not have any up-and-coming shows, aside from one in Detroit. But their work can be seen in the meantime adorning the walls and tables of Le Swimming bar on St. Laurent.

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