



MICHELE KAPLAN

**Scott MacLeod, Francis Caprani**

"I grew up in downtown Montreal," says Pedros. "And Francis (Caprani, the third member of La Raza Group) is from the heart of Dublin. The older I get, the more I realize that it's more to do with my background in inner-city gangs. We just changed our motorcycle jackets for paint brushes. If it was just for art, I would've canned it a long time ago."

Caprani doesn't mince his words when explaining his loyalty to La Raza Group. Says Caprani: "I think most artists are pricks. I find that Gerry and Scott are the only artists I can talk to, and share ideas. It's easy for us to talk to each other, and it's not art-speak. It's not the gobbledegook you read in the art magazines."

"Three heads are better than one," is how MacLeod sums it up.

Three heads — and three sets of paint brushes — also seem to have helped them carve a niche for themselves in the highly competitive contemporary art world. La Raza Group — which was named after the slum they lived in for a few months in Mexico City — was formed in 1988. Pedros, 40, and Caprani, 41, went to art school together back in the '70s, but they only founded the group after meeting MacLeod, 26, a couple of years back. Pedros was MacLeod's lithography prof at Concordia.

Since forming, the group has managed to generate a fair buzz about their work, even though they've never had much of a profile here in Montreal. Last year, they had a group show in Cologne, Germany, and they exhibited in Dublin and Mexico this past summer.

Back home, they're probably best-known as the guys behind the eye-catching canvasses at the trendy Swimming poolroom/bar on St. Laurent. The

three artists have no qualms whatsoever about showing off their work in a poolroom, and they seem quite happy to bypass the usual clique-ish gallery circuit. In the past, they've even had an exhibit at Antidote a chic local hairdressing salon.

"We take a meat-and-potatoes approach to art," says Pedros, in a phone interview from his home in St. Thomas, just outside of London, Ontario, where he moved a couple of years ago.

"All the stuff we've got....no one's handed it to us. I realized when I was a little kid that there's no Santa Claus. You gotta do it for yourselves."

That pragmatism extends to the paintings too. Pedros, Caprani, and MacLeod refuse to be pigeon-holed stylistically, and they're willing to change the style depending on the contract. In the case of *Le Swimming*, they created the 30 paintings based on the owners' specifications that there would be a bank of TV monitors mounted on the wall.

"Consistency is proof of a stagnant mind," says Caprani. "Gerry, Scott, and I paint very realistic to very abstract to social realism, and it keeps going back and forth."

Many of the Raza paintings have political themes — with quite a few references to the Irish-British conflict — while some of the other images are more intangible.

"There's no limit," says MacLeod. "It's not just one style. We get bored really quickly doing the same thing."

Though they have done some pieces collectively — including a few, large murals — most of their paintings are solo works. But they're adamant that the influence of all three Raza Group members can always be felt in every painting. They often recycle bits and pieces of each other's work; for example, a snippet of one of Caprani's paintings may end up stuck at the bottom of one of Pedros'. The last time Pedros was at the group's studio — which is located in an old factory in St. Henri — he filled up a garbage bag with discarded pieces from their work to bring to his own studio in St. Thomas.

"It's all about influences," says Caprani. "We challenge each other all the time. Each person forces change in the next person. We have squabbles, but we like to have a laugh at ourselves too."

## ART La Raza Group: The artist as street gang stylist

By Brendan Kelly

**L**a Raza Group is like a rock band. At least so says Scott MacLeod, who is one of the members of this Montreal trio of artists, and a part-time rock musician himself. MacLeod makes the comparison while attempting to define the adventurous, sometimes-iconoclastic spirit of these three Montreal painters.

Gerald Pedros prefers to think of La Raza Group as something akin to a street gang.