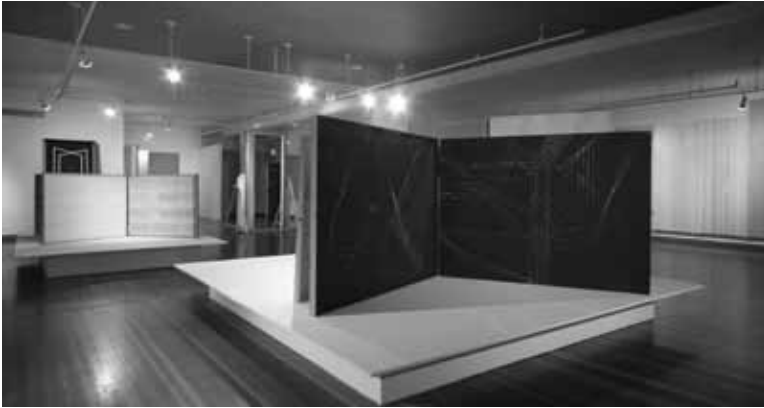


**Carlos Villa: *Manongs, some doors,  
and a bouquet of crates***

Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts

Curated by Maurizio Hector Piñeda

Alison Woods



In his most recent show *Manongs, some doors, and a bouquet of crates*, Villa creates a syncretic exhibition sharing the experience of what it means to be a Manong in San Francisco's Manilatown and in a larger sense, what it means to be human. Thoughtfully curated by Maurizio Hectar Piñeda, the show focuses on Villa's most recent work – hand crafted wooden painted boxes (crates) and found doors, coupled with a few of his assemblage pieces incorporating hats, feathers and other signifiers of Filipino identity.

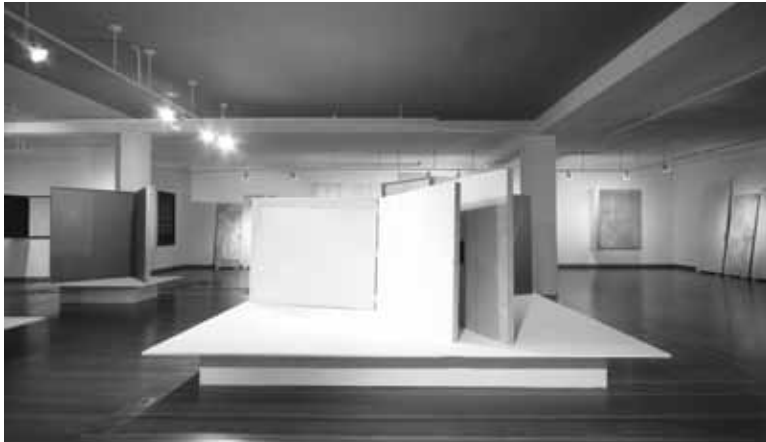
The title is poetic. Doors are openings, opportunities, and new beginnings. A bouquet suggests arrangement of something – flowers, herbs, fruits, gifts or decorations. Manong is a term used to loosely describe the single Filipino men who immigrated in to the United States mostly in the pre-depression era, which due to the lack of Filipino women mostly remained bachelors

and lived alone in poverty. Many of them lived in San Francisco, in or around the I Hotel in Chinatown.

The exhibit is arranged in two rooms with the main exhibition of recent works featured in the larger room, and minimalist pieces from the 60's, recent drawings and videos giving a back-story in a smaller room, to the rear of the larger space.

The main room is organized to lead the viewer through the narrative that threads through Villa's work. The first works to be encountered are the assemblage pieces. These include a piece titled *Kearny Street Gameby Matins*. Matins being the morning church service. Loosely organized as a map of the neighborhood, key streets and significant words are laid out using ceremonial plaques, a material that reoccurs throughout the exhibition. The next three assemblage pieces each feature an actual hat, which the viewer imagines on the head of an invisible man. In *"My Dad Walking on Kearny Street for the First Time"* the hat is at the very bottom – black feathers loom above as a dark apparition or a dark angel. Upon





closer scrutiny the feathers become the buildings on Kearny Street and words begin to appear: “Orient” which bears a double meaning, “silence”, “self loathe”, “pressure”, “pressing”, and centered most prominently “desire”. In the second piece “*Future Plans*” the hat, this time higher up in the composition, is centered in front of two opening doors. Villa again makes use of ceremonial plaques with key phrases – “hallways smell of Vicks and adobo”. The third assemblage is titled “*Where My Uncles Went*” and the hat is looking at a graphic revolving door with multiple destinations including “from Seattle to Stockton”, “Kearny Street to So El Dorado”.

From there the viewer encounters Villa’s door pieces and crates. The crates are very meticulously crafted boxes with a methodical set of iconography Villa uses to deliver a narrative. The exteriors often have a simple icon symbolizing the content on the inside. The insides are intentionally painted different colors, based on a symbology Villa has developed. The insides are etched using an Awl, a tool used in woodworking and leatherwork. The etched insides form geometric patterns, which in some cases are

pleasingly composed as abstractions in their own right, and other times are interrupted with expressive horizontal or vertical intense line interventions. Each piece is carefully titled, to give the viewer a clue to its intended message. The piece *Beginner’s Mind* features a blank cover, and an inside painted grey and devoid of any markings. Centered in the right side of the crate is a grid of silver cubes.

The first door presented is a piece entitled *Me and You*. Two doors stand side by side, the left one is painted white and the one on the right is painted grey. Both contain diagonal lines etched by an awl onto the surface. The lines create an abstract geometric composition. The lines on the two pieces do not mimic each other, but there is one set of diagonal lines that begin on the left panel jump over a gap and continue their course on the right panel, perhaps signifying the place where life experiences cross over. Villa believed in opening doors, and in keeping the doors open.

