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Queer Neo-Mexicanism: Negotiating Mexican and Gay Identities in the Art of Nahum B. Zenil and Julio Galán

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The Mexican artists Nahum B. Zenil and Julio Galán have become the poster children for being gay and Mexican in contemporary art criticism. Critics have drawn comparisons between Zenil and Galán because of their thematic treatment of gay sexuality and Mexican nationalism. These comparisons, however, have often assumed that Zenil and Galán are representing a monolithic gay sexuality that is unaffected by their social class, their relationships to nationalism and Catholicism, and their views on the role of art in social activism. This paper aims to analyze specifically how Zenil and Galán represent two distinct gay identities, all the while employing the similar themes of suffering, the vulnerability of the gay male body, and the use of nationalist and Catholic symbols. Through a close reading of visual texts and the methodological lens of queer theory and art history, the paper will show that both artists represent homosexuality as a social construction that is influenced by the other identity categories the artists inhabit.

Information about the Author:

Nicholas Derda is a senior Spanish major. He is interested in visual representations of masculinity, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS, especially in a Latin American context. Next year, he will be interning as the legal clinic coordinator at the Bread for the City social service agency in Washington, D.C.

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