

## IMMIGRANT ART ENRIQUE CHAGOYA

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### **Body**

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These are the voices and works of immigrant artists living in the Bay Area. Although their work is visual, and mostly public, they are invisible immigrants.

They do not stand out in plain view or in political debates over immigration like the immigrant farmworker, janitor, maid or day laborer. Yet a thousand years from now their art will help illustrate the ongoing story of America's willingness to welcome immigrants, change them and in turn be changed by them.

The works of 15 artists, not all of them represented here, are on exhibit in "Coming Across: Art by Recent Immigrants, Part 1" through April 20 at the Euphrat Museum of Art at De Anza College in Cupertino. For further information, call the museum at (408) 864-8356.

The first shock which you get is that you are missing certain things which you took for granted from your own country. Nostalgia becomes very strong. You have a sense of emptiness, a cultural vacuum. You develop a critical standpoint to both countries.

On the other hand, the lack of integration means a constant need for redefining yourself. And suddenly you become a different person, like a person from a country that does not exist, has nothing to do with geopolitical boundaries. Little by little you find fellow citizens of that country, immigrants, refugees, etc. There is an easiness communicating. The San Francisco Bay Area is one of richest areas in the country and world for a plural cultural experience. You feel you're not a foreigner here.

Real immigration takes place internally. People come here, but it may be years before they land here. It has nothing to do with paper. Instead of change of place, it is a journey of the spirit, different from being a nomad. It's a whole transformation.

On American lands, Native Americans, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans saw themselves annexed -- this country arrived to them. They experience a form of immigrant status. But originally they were not immigrants. Who was the actual immigrant? The U.S. as a dominant culture? Or Native Americans?

In a world which has masses of people who move, we are talking about a spiritual experience in everybody. Everyone is an immigrant of some kind.

### **Notes**

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Immigration: New Beginnings

An occasional series

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See also related story on this page.

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