

ART IN REVIEW

E40

Enrique Chagoya

George Adams
41 West 57th Street
Through May 20

Born in Mexico and now living in California, Enrique Chagoya is a product of European artistic tradition, Central American folk culture and 20th-century Pop. A gifted caricaturist and mimic, he grapples with the conflicts of his own hybrid inheritance, giving expression to an irreverent, wildly pluralistic imagination.

On canvas the artist layers stereotypes of New World primitivism over the ghosts of European painting. In one, naked cannibals lifted from egregiously racist pictures by Theodore De Bry, a 17th-century Dutch explorer, are painted over a pale-blue copy of Manet's "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe." This evokes a split in European consciousness between high-minded sophistication and the unconscious savagery it has projected onto other peoples.

Mr. Chagoya also uses the Mesoamerican codex, a horizontal scroll-like narrative format. A 10-foot-long work, "An American Primitive in Paris," mixes Superman, Jesus, goofy characters from French comics, Aztec diagrams, Claude Monet eviscerated and Che Guevara with a baby's body reading a Mr. Natural comic book. This panoply of small-scale images fiercely satirizes the enduring legacy of Western elitism and imperialism.

The paradox of all this, not disavowed by the artist, is that for better or worse only the continuing tradition of European modernism (or postmodernism) provides a home for the antic, self-reflexive cultural critique that Mr. Chagoya practices.

KEN JOHNSON