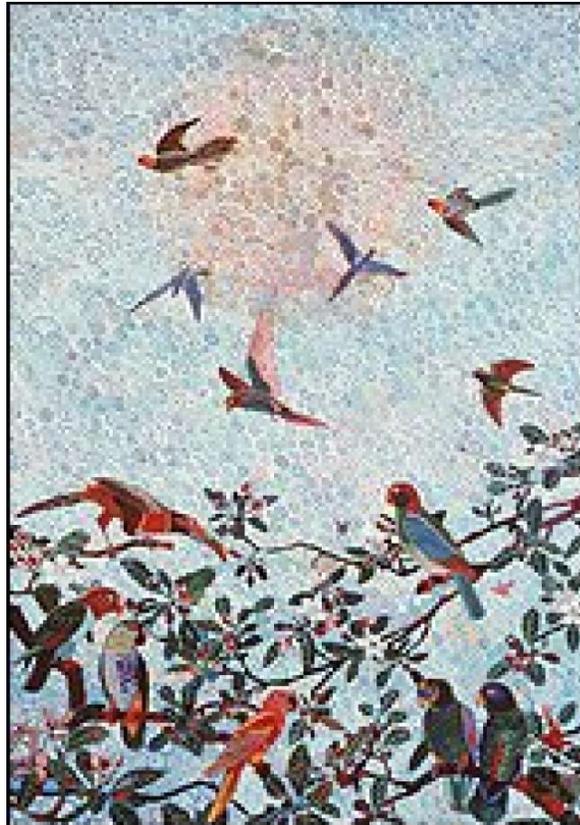


Arreguin's complex paintings on exhibit

By JUDY WAGONFELD, SPECIAL TO THE POST-INTELLIGENCER Published 10:00 pm, Thursday, June 21, 2001
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"Pericos Bay" exhibits the vibrant colors of the rain forest that are prevalent in Alfredo Arreguin's work. His work appears disarmingly simple.

Anyone hankering for nature's sound of silence has never trod in a raucous, pulsating jungle, engulfed in reverberating, hypnotic sound. Artist **Alfredo Arreguin** has and knows it eerie, tantalizing power well.

As a teenager, laboring deep beneath a rain forest's sun-obscuring canopy, he fell prey to its surrealistic beauty, hallucinatory hues, languid air and ambrosial scents. Aware of furtive eyes masked by exotic blossoms, dangling vines and primordial overgrowth tracking his every move, he felt enchanted and intimidated. For Arreguin, encroaching



violates an unspoken moral code.

Although Arreguin believes this passionately, in his art he skips the fly-swatter approach, knowing you catch more flies with honey. Wily and calculated, his paintings glisten with myriad symbols drawn from pre-Columbian, Aztec and Mexican folk-art images, Asia and the Pacific Northwest. Meshed in kaleidoscopic puzzles, his work appears

disarmingly simple. But, like the jungle, its complexity lures beyond the decorative to broader universal beliefs.

"Alfredo is a master of ambiguity," said **Lauro Flores**, author of "Alfredo Arreguin: Patterns of Dreams in Nature," due from **University of Washington Press** next January. To be published in conjunction with a 30-year retrospective at the **Bellevue Art Museum** March 23-June 24, 2002, it will be the first book on this enigmatic painter, in whose art, says Flores, "the more you look, the more you find."

Brian Wallace, BAM curator of the Arreguin exhibit, agrees. "Arreguin insidiously draws you in." Riotous colors seduce, he says, through labyrinths of hybrid cultures. Layer upon layer speaks non-judgmentally of the environment's beauty and dangers.

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Arreguin avoids the frightening parts. As a child, the bloodshed and menacing figures in the political murals of Diego Rivera and others terrified him. Rather than portray fear or destruction, he opts for the blocky Aztec and Mayan statues of ancient souls who lived in concert with the land. He favors the indigenous flora and fauna of Mexico, where he lived until age 20, and the Pacific Northwest where he's lived since. And he lauds endangered species and their advocates -- icons for truth.

In "Magdalena," **Frida Kahlo's** eyes spill wisdom, anguish and defiance, piercing through

vibrant tropical foliage as opulent as her trademark floral dresses. Evocative of an ephemeral Madonna, she oozes creativity and nurturance. "Look around me," she seems to say, "at innocence, mystical wonders and vulnerability."

In Arreguin's patterned canvases, window and door shapes lead to unconscious realms. In the manner that portraits emerge from Chuck Close's grids, Arreguin's "Tariacuri" features a central totem glowing within a chessboard of faces and flowers. Encircled by a halo, it links Mexico's two civilizations, Indian and Catholic Spaniards.

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Closer to home, "The Elwa River" ponders the mysterious salmon. By appropriating Katsushika Hokusai's (1760-1849) woodblock image of The Great Wave, Arreguin lifts the glorious fuchsia and green fish from political plight to a single-minded instinct for survival similar to that of the fisherman below Hokusai's enormous foaming wave.

"Camilia II," a portrait of an impenetrable jungle, seethes with clandestine life. Expertly honed in iridescent indigo, magenta, emerald and ruby, it only reluctantly betrays its elusive butterflies, chameleons, iguanas, tropical flowers, exotic birds, spider webs, bugs and frogs. Like all of Arreguin's painting, it echoes the dynamic interdependence, both of his canvases and of life.

Though working in the Northwest since the '60s, Arreguin fell outside the realm of Northwest artists. While they brooded in somber tones, Arreguin splashed Latino palettes onto canvases in designs influenced by Mexico and by his architecture and interior design studies. Unbeknownst to him, he was pattern painting several years ahead of New York's 1970s Post-Modern Pattern and Design movement. Eschewing the 1950s and '60s abstract minimalism, P&D leaders **Joyce Kosloff** and **Miriam Schapiro** drew inspiration from Matisse, Gauguin and folk-art motifs. Meanwhile, enhanced by literature's Magic Realism, especially works by **Gabriel García Márquez**, Latino art came into its own. It made its way into the Smithsonian, which in 1994 purchased Arreguin's monumental triptych "Sueno (Dream: Eve Before Adam)."

Arreguin's visual feasts tread softly on conflicts between our love of nature and lust for commercial gain. Yet they clearly imply we can't have Eden once we burn the jungle's bewitching miracles. His decorative style grabs like the delicious first sentence of a darne good book. Simultaneously, it won't let you off the hook. Exactly the elusive qualities that allow art to endure.

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