

# Seattle Post-Intelligencer

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Honoring low-rent high style: "Cocinando Carnitas" by Hugo Ludeña. ( )

## Hugo Ludeña's images capture the glory in the rundown, the beauty amid the beastly

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By REGINA HACKETT  
P-I ART CRITIC

In a rundown backyard in Seattle, a chef prepares for a party. Were it not for the scale of his efforts, he might be in hobo camp cooking soup in a can, but that kind of solitary life has nothing to do with this solitary man.

His giant pots suggest the community that is waiting in the wings, hundreds strong. The real heart of the matter is the food. It looks delicious. Linen napkins are missing and so are the crystal and silver, but this dinner promises to make expensive fare at fancy restaurants seem impoverished.

"Cocinando Carnitas" comes from *Hugo Ludeña's* debut exhibit at the Greg Kucera Gallery. Richly colored and modestly sized, his photos are an inside job.

Like London's Richard Billingham, Ludeña is best on the fly, catching in motion the people he knows. Class and race are issues for both, and both concentrate on what is lovely or vital within squalor. The English artist's operatic version of excess makes Ludeña's seem almost neat, but both deliver powerful rejoinders to those who might disdain their people.

**VISUAL ART REVIEW**  
**HUGO LUDEÑA and WHITING**  
**TENNIS**

*WHERE:* Greg Kucera Gallery,  
212 Third Ave. S..

*WHEN:* Through Sept. 27. 10:30  
a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

Billingham's compositions exult in rude joy, and Ludeña's honor low-rent high style.

In the latter's "Atado a tu Amor," a recently married male couple prepare to pop the corks on the bubbly. Their white dinner jackets are festooned with dollar bills, pinned on by well-wishers. Both are lit with the pleasure of their families' applause.

The sexual current runs hot as does the metaphor, each man holding a bottle that is ready to pop. In "Ay Chihuahua," it pops. A husband rears back as champagne shoots geyser-like from the bottle he holds, and his bride wrinkles her face in distaste. The photo is a foretaste of the fun they will not be having.

Another heterosexual couple poses on a front porch, dressed for the prom. They are outrageously beautiful, but the trailer park around them has seen better days. Proud of their bloom, they are flowers at a dump.

This exhibit covers nearly a decade of work. Ludeña's next show will be crucial. Like Seattle's Charles Peterson, his forte is action. Had he edited out most of the still portraits, he would have made an even stronger first impression.

In the back gallery, *Whiting Tennis*'s drawings and wall constructions are a dry cough next to Ludeña's belly laugh. Because *Tennis*' sources (George Herms, Philip Guston) are hot and his work is cool, it offers a compelling contradiction. It's raw with the reserve of a well-trained butler.

Within the gap between expectation and delivery, he thrives. Does he deliberately miscue the audience? His drawings and models of houses and chests of drawers remind me of the setup for a joke ("A bear walks into a bar") deprived of a punch line.

He is an artist who changes not his work but the audience for his work. Looking at it over time, I'm beginning to embrace what used to repel me, its immaculate and chilly reserves.

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