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Article “Clash City Roca”
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Clash City Roca, Philly scores a world-class talent.

Young artists are pouring into Philadelphia and pumping up the city’s art scene. Joining them is an esteemed young curator who’s come all the way from Bogotá.

Jose Roca, who co-curated the 2006 Sao Paulo Biennial, will officially arrive in Philly with his family in 2008. Meanwhile, as newly appointed artistic director of Philagrafika, he slips in and out of town to give presentations on the 2010 print festival and check out local schools with his twin 13-year-old daughters (whom he calls his “long-term commitment to multiples”).

Roca’s decision to join Philagrafika is a coup. Not only does the 44-year-old chief of temporary exhibitions and museology at Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango bring his expertise as a festival organizer, he brings a big vision as well. And because he’s globally connected, he knows where to find exciting art.

Some artists he’s currently interested in are Betsabée Romera (Mexico), Oscar Muñoz (Colombia), Juan Devis and his online video game *Tropical America* (Los Angeles) and the team of Allora and Calzadilla (Puerto Rico), who were recently featured in the “Empathetic” show at Temple Gallery.

Philagrafika will unite several Philadelphia institutions—Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA), Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Fabric Workshop and Museum, and the Print Center—in a collaborative event. The core exhibit will be housed at PAFA. Roca’s curatorial team (which includes PAFA’s Alex Baker along with Print Center’s Jacqueline van Rhyne and Lorei Mertes of Moore College of Art) will both commission new work and corral existing art from all parts of the globe.



The great curator: Jose Roca will join Philagrafika in 2010.

“I’m not a print specialist, but I’ve done 15 to 20 print shows,” Roca says. In his view a print can be more than ink on paper. It can be a tire track on a road, a set of footprints in the sand, a stenciled image on a wall or even a video game played over and over.

This isn’t the curator’s first encounter with Philadelphia. Roca came here in 2002 after participating in the Whitney Museum’s independent studies program, and for seven months he was the ICA’s Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow. He organized “Traces of Friday”—a densely packed exhibit about travel and displacement—and taught a course at Penn.

He knows Carlos Basualdo, the PMA’s curator of contemporary art who was also part of the ISP, but they didn’t meet at the Whitney.

“Carlos was, how do you say, a child prodigy,” laughs Roca. “He’s a lot younger than I am and he went to the Whitney long before I did. He curated a show at my museum in 1995. It was a very beautiful show.”

Roca will be here for two and a half years. “Then I will be without a job,” he says. Post-Philagrafika, he’s not planning on returning to Bogotá. After 15 years as chief of his museum’s contemporary exhibition program, he says it’s time to move on. Let’s hope we can persuade this warm curator with big ideas to stay with us a while longer.