

# Calendar

## Our Sin Was in Our Hips

### *The Turntable as Art*

**D**ario Robleto melts old vinyl records. He also grinds them into powder. Then the 30-year-old artist recasts new objects from the former tunes — ones shaped like bullets and human bone structures, for example.

Like a deejay, he makes his song selections carefully. For a piece called *Not All Dead Rather Be Living*, he chose Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff," as well as works by John Lennon ("Happiness is a Warm Gun"), Marvin Gaye ("Sexual Healing"), and Kurt Cobain ("Lithium"), to create replicas

of U.S. Civil War-era "pain bullets" — used by soldiers to bite on during

battlefield surgery. Into the mix also went Tupac Shakur's gangsta rap "Hit 'Em Up," Sam Cooke's "Someone Have Mercy," and Del Shannon's "Runaway."

All except Marley, who died of cancer, were killed by gunshots, self-inflicted or otherwise.

Robleto, speaking from his home in San Antonio, Texas, shortly before he flew to San Diego for the opening of his latest exhibition, described the actual bullets from which he made his molds. "They're amazing forms of history, when you think about what they represent. Some look like chewing gum. You can imagine the force exerted," which often broke the men's teeth, he has read. "The ones I found were from Union surgical campsites, so you have to think: what was the pain for in the first place? That adds to the layers of meaning."

For a piece called *The Diva Surgery*, Robleto was even more selective with his vinyl choices. "I've taken individual grooves, sliced carefully, surgically removed parts." The cuts (literally) are by female vocalists from several different eras, including Ella Fitzgerald, Patsy Cline, Diana Ross, Aretha Franklin, Billie Holiday, and Bessie Smith. Robleto also used magnetic audio tape recordings of the women's voices (which he dissolved), Novocain, sugar, honey, seawater, and beeswax. The mixtures are displayed in vintage glass beakers, along with other antique laboratory equipment, inside a Plexiglas box that seems to be part coffin, part dressing table.

The personal record collections of Robleto's parents provided raw materials for *Our Sin Was in Our Hips*. His mother's 45s became a female



DJ Atari at On Broadway

pelvis; his father's 33s, a male pelvis. The amalgams contain real, pulverized, human pelvic bone, too.

"My parents were born at the beginning of the baby boom, in the 1940s," the artist said. "They discovered rock-and-roll when it was new. My mother's collection ranged from Beatles to B.B. King to Connie Francis. My father's titles are mainly Beatles. He was a huge fan. Where are my Beatles? Where's my Bob Dylan? I don't know if history will judge Eminem the same way as Dylan. You know? I think he'll have to be taken into account, but in my musical generation there has never been anything at stake, like in the '60s music and its bigger political meanings."

The pelvic piece also functions as a kind of self-portrait. "The hips are in the act of reproduction; they're implying that that's me. I know music played a large part in bringing my parents together. So I'm taking the individual memories imbedded in their song selections. I would argue that they're as much an identifier of

someone as anything else. There's a whole generation of us out there who were born because of our parents' coming into their own with their music."

Robleto's work is rooted in his interest in the deejay culture and hip-hop, sampling specifically. To sample means to isolate, manipulate, and combine brief clips of instruments or vocals to create new sounds. "In the deejay world, great pride is taken in finding the most obscure samples. It involves hours of sifting through record bins in thrift stores and attics and basements. [Deejays are] like any other sort of fetishized collecting circle, where people go to extremes to find that one thing everyone else forgot. I grew up with the ability to understand that. Now as a sculptor I've applied it to my sculptural world."

On Thursday, deejays from San Diego, L.A., and Tijuana will be at the gallery to display their skills. "One of them, [L.A.'s] Justin Boyd, I picked myself," said Robleto. "He has deejayed at almost every one of my openings. He

deejays in several ways, but one in particular is visually and audibly similar to what I have done sculpturally. He dissects the records live right in front of you, then plays with the sounds. Sometimes it's very subtle, like a little scratch, which will create a loop when he plays the record. It'll skip, and he'll start deejaying off of that. He's going to use many of the same records that I've used in my sculptures."

There will also be a screening of *Scratch*, the 2002 documentary about hip-hop deejays-turntablists — who, like Boyd, use turntables not to play music, but to create it.

— Jeanne Schinto

**"Dario Robleto: A Surgeon, A Scalpel, and A Soul"**  
Thursday, August 7, 7:00 p.m.  
Museum of Contemporary Art,  
San Diego  
1001 Kettner Boulevard,  
Downtown  
Free (\$3 donation welcome)  
Info: 619-234-1001 or  
[www.mcasd.org](http://www.mcasd.org)

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