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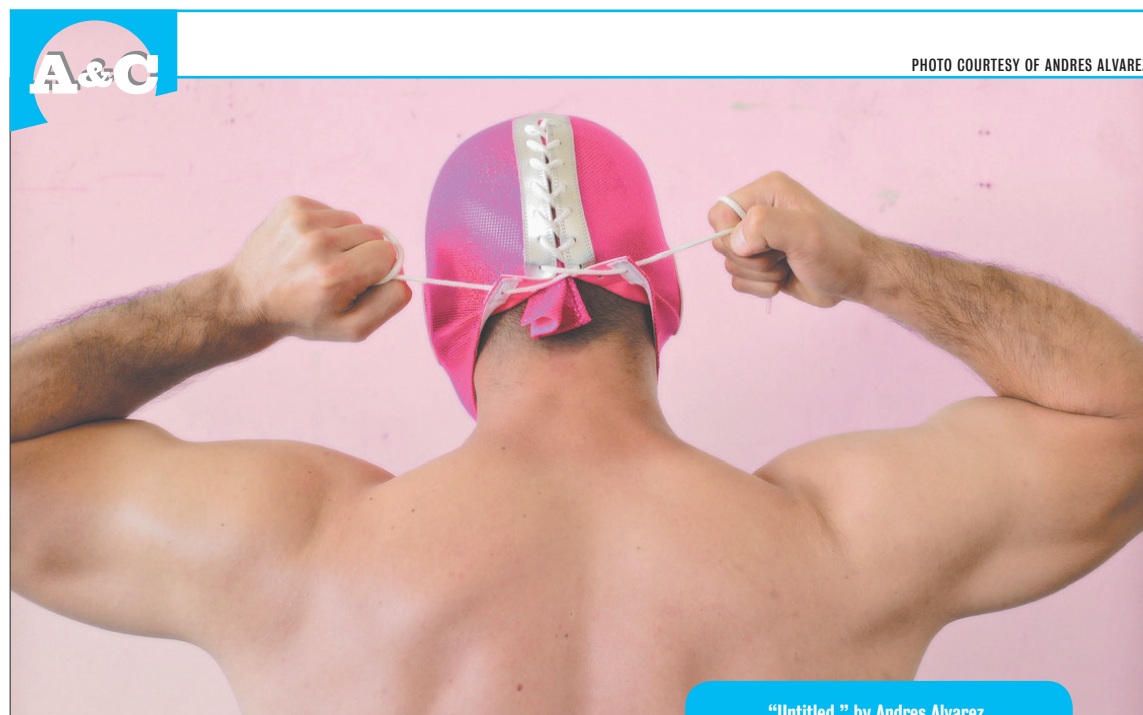
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"Untitled," by Andres Alvarez.

Behind the mask

A new exhibit explores self-identity through Mexican masked wrestling

BY **NORMA HUERTA** / normah@newsreview.com

Concealed identity became a motif of Mexican pro wrestling through El Santo, a luchador who donned a silver mask in the ring and in televised interviews and movies. Throughout his career between 1934 and 1982, the legend became inseparable from the man, Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta. When he died in 1984, Huerta was buried with his mask.

"As a kid, I loved it," said Andres Alvarez, a photographer at the Latino Center of Art and Culture in Sacramento. "When I had my son, my brother-in-law told me a story about his dad, who told him that when he was born, the room was full of luchadores. That was such a beautiful story, and I thought: 'When my son's born, there's going to be a luchador in there.'"

Staying true to his word, Alvarez wore a luchador mask in the delivery room.

"The way I raise my son is a mask that I gave him," he said. "So there's going to be times where we're going to be wearing the same masks as tag team partners, and there's going to be times where we're going to be opponents."

La Lucha: Convergence of Identity—a new interactive exhibit that opens at the Latino Center on Saturday, Sept. 21—is Alvarez's labor of love. Using photos, collage art, paintings and drawings, he recreates the family home he grew up in and

explores the metaphorical masks we are given or choose through the lens of lucha libre.

"Identity begins in the home," Alvarez said. "I think of all of the ways identity is modeled at home, of all the masks I acquired, and I felt myself in my home, as a child, staring out the window like a luchador staring out [into] the ring."

On opening day for the exhibit, you're invited to enjoy music, traditional Mexican cuisine and murals hung around the center's tree-shaded grounds. You can also become a luchador: Try on a mask and flex your best wrestling pose in an outdoor ring.

Step inside, and you're transported to a space where the artist's identity was born. Artwork and posters line the walls, while an old radio plays the songs of Alvarez's childhood.

"I want to capture the process of 'us vs them,' of *los tecnicos* (good luchadores) and *los rudos* (bad luchadores), of how the size of our house and the style of our furniture dictated our class," he said.

The open space is reminiscent of a humble upbringing. A bulky TV encourages you to sit on the sofa and watch a lucha libre match. Scuffed, mix-matched chairs surround a large wooden dining table.

In a corner, there's a makeshift bedroom with a single bed and dresser surrounded by the photographs of masked men, women and children. Among the portraits is a black-and-white photo of two members of the California-based activist group Brown Issues, in masks and shirts emblazoned with the word "VOTER."

Alvarez said he and five other featured artists—including Sonya Fe, Alejandra Osorio Olave and Aida Lizalde—hope to open up a dialogue on identity.

"It's not really the lucho photos that are resting on the lawn. It's how are you interpreting these images," he said. "What's going on in your head? What kind of matches are you having? And then exploring that a little deeper once you get out of here." □

Check out *La Lucha: Convergence of Identity: A Visual & Interactive Exploration of Self* beginning Sept. 21 at The Latino Center of Art the Culture; Runs through Dec. 21; 2700 Front St. For more info, visit thelatinocenter.com.