



ARTWORK **NIGHT BEFORE LAST/CHICAGO**

ARTIST **ARTURO HERRERA**

INSTALLED 2006
U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

An enticing glimpse of Arturo Herrera's *Night Before Last/Chicago* is visible to those entering the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) building in Chicago. The mural's tangled arabesques tumble out of sight as they proceed toward the atrium, sparking curiosity and conversation from visitors and employees who wish to decipher the artwork's meanings. In some areas, the swirling lines gather into evocative fragments of cartoon figures from the 1937 Disney animated feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. In other sections, the paint strokes loosen into vibrant abstractions, reminiscent of Jackson Pollock's famous action paintings. Herrera seamlessly blends these two quintessential icons of American culture, along with myriad other references and influences, to create an artwork that resists easy definition and remains open to the unique perspectives and interpretations of individual viewers.

As the district headquarters for the USCIS, the building receives visitors from all parts of the world daily. The universally recognizable cartoon imagery of *Night Before Last/Chicago* starts viewers out along familiar paths, allowing them to identify select forms: Snow White's hair tied with a bow, the bulbous shoes and caps of the seven dwarfs, the handle of a pickaxe, a candlestick, small tufts of grass, a fluttering bird, and many other details. But the longer one looks at Herrera's collaged image, the more one discovers. Soon, new and more personal associations may begin to emerge. Attempts to interpret the mural's intricately layered shapes require creativity, imagination, and a willingness to engage new ideas. Such qualities are needed for any exploration, and are thematically relevant to the many visitors who arrive at the federal building in the midst of their journey toward a new life in a new country.

Herrera—who was born in Venezuela—was once on such a journey. Following his university studies in the United States and periods abroad, he returned to Chicago to pursue graduate education and eventually acquired U.S. citizenship. Reflecting on his own experiences—which included many visits to buildings like this one—Herrera conceived *Night Before Last/Chicago* as an artwork that speaks to and energizes the broad range of people visiting the USCIS each day. MF

HERRERA



Arturo Herrera was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1959 and currently lives and works in Berlin and New York. He received his BFA from the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1982 and his MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1992. Since then, Herrera's work has been shown in numerous museum exhibitions around the world. Individual exhibitions of his work include *Arturo Herrera: Castles, Dwarfs, and Happychaps* (2007) at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut; *Arturo Herrera* (2005) at the Galician Center for Contemporary Art in Santiago de Compostela, Spain; and *Arturo Herrera* (1998) at the Renaissance Society of the University of Chicago. Herrera's work has been shown in many group exhibitions, as well, such as *Comic Abstraction: Image-Breaking, Image-Making* (2007) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; *Extreme Abstraction* (2005) at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York; *Splat Boom Pow! The Influence of Cartoons in Contemporary Art* (2003) at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston; the 2002 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; and *Painting at the Edge of the World* (2001) at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Among Herrera's awards are a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship in 2005 and a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Fellowship in 2003. *Night Before Last/Chicago* is Herrera's first permanent public artwork in the United States.

MEDIUM ENAMEL PAINT ON WALL

DIMENSIONS 8 FT X 37 FT

