

# Artist highlights shanty builders' imagination

## Exhibit focuses on humble homes as an art form

By Claudia Boyd-Barrett  
Special to the Star

To most people, Malibu's mansions and Mexico's shanty homes couldn't be more different. But to Mexico-born artist Olguin Tapia, when he drove from Oxnard to classes at CSU Los Angeles a few years ago, something about Malibu's hillside mansions reminded him of home.

Like the haphazard structures of recycled metal, wood and plastic that frequently crowd the outskirts of Mexican towns, the mansions too were clustered together and bathed in early morning light.

And while Malibu's homes are a symbol of opulence, Mexico's shanty homes have their own unique beauty and value, he thought.

"Some people think it's just dirty or unsanitary, but it's a home, and it's nothing different to what theirs is," he said. "To those who live in these homes, it's worth their life."

In honor of these humble structures, Tapia has created a multimedia exhibit that opens this week at the Carnegie Art Museum's CAM Studio Gallery in downtown Oxnard.

Titled Cartolandia — which means "cardboard land" in Spanish — the exhibit features paintings, drawings and sculptures of the ramshackle dwellings, and a life-size installation of the inside of a shanty home.

"I want people to appreciate the artistic and the actual beauty of the homes," Tapia said as he sat in his workshop at the studio last week, next to a pile of wooden planks, plastic covering and old crates he planned to use for the installation. "Just to admire them for what they are made of. Just to be like, wow, it actually takes imagination to build these, and creativity. I want them to see it as an art form, to appreciate what they really are."

Tapia's family moved from the Mexican state of Michoacan to Oxnard when he was 7. Now 28, he said he still has fond memories of his childhood in Mexico, where four generations of his family lived crammed into a small adobe house that belonged to his great-grandmother. Just like the house, everything around it was mad, and Tapia loved to build little towns and houses out of the earth. He thinks that's where his talent for sculpting began.

After graduating from Hueneume High School, Tapia decided to pursue art at Oxnard College. He went on to study at CSU Los Angeles, obtaining a bachelor's degree in studio arts in 2015.

Tapia said he likes to work in series, and has created two other collections, one using geometric shapes, another depicting nature.

"Cartolandia" is his first solo show. The Carnegie Art Museum invited Tapia to be a guest artist at the CAM Studio Gallery based on his work, his connections to Oxnard, and recommendations from his professors, said the museum's director Suzanne Bellah.

Tapia said he's been working since June 27 from early in the morning until late at night to complete the five paintings, four drawings and 13 sculptures for the exhibit. "I wanted to use this studio space to



Just one of many art pieces by Olguin Tapia awaiting installation at the CAM Studio Gallery located in Oxnard Friday afternoon.

its fullest," he said. "To be given this opportunity, it's more than I could ever ask for."

Bellah, the director, said she was impressed by Tapia's unusual subject matter, and the way he has turned something that could be construed as negative into a positive.

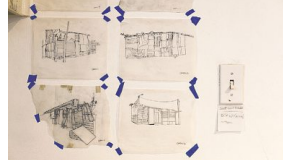
"If you see the art, you'll understand why we picked him. It's very well done and extremely interesting," she said. "I think this show's going to be a knockout."

Tapia's exhibit opens Friday with a reception from 6 to 8 p.m. The exhibit will run until mid-October. Opening hours are Thursdays through Saturdays 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sundays 1 to 5 p.m. The Carnegie Art Museum is located at 329 N. Fifth St., Oxnard.



Artist Olguin Tapia works on a room installation at the CAM Studio Gallery located in Oxnard Friday afternoon. LEFT: Artist Olguin Tapia sits in front of his artwork, which is being installed at the Carnegie Art Museum's Studio Gallery in Oxnard Friday afternoon.

**CARTOLANDIA**  
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Sketches by Olguin Tapia are taped to a wall at the CAM Studio Gallery located in Oxnard Friday afternoon.