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Gallery | Dzine Offers an Artistic History of Boxing, From the Greeks to Pay-Per-View

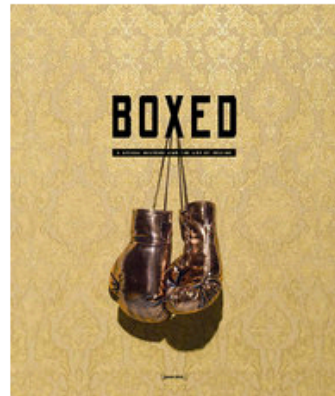
CULTURE | By WILLIAM VAN METER | MAY 30, 2014 1:05 PM

The artist Carlos Rolón, better known as **Dzine**, has long been a boxing fan, if not a practitioner. “My father took me for boxing lessons when I was 13,” he says. “I was more scared than excited. I developed a hernia.” The injury didn’t dampen his passion, which has led him to produce “**Boxed: A Visual History and the Art of Boxing**,” an image-driven compendium of the sport, from the Grecian Olympiads to bare-knuckle fighting to today’s megabucks stadium battles.

“When I looked at other boxing books,” Rolón says, “I never saw them from the viewpoint of an artist. It was always from a fan or an ex-fighter.” “Boxed” is designed to appeal to both art aficionados and enthusiasts of the sport. It features diverse photos, from PQ Blackwell’s stark portraits of pugilists to Cheryl Dunn’s images of heavily made-up girls waving placards beside the ring. Works from heavyweights including Warhol, Basquiat and Beuys also offer perspectives on the brutal ballet.

“It’s like the riddle of the sphinx,” Rolón says of artists’ boxing fetish. “It’s a visually stunning sport, whether you love the fighting or the pageantry or the girls with gobs of makeup. There is this idea of winning, crushing defeat, not to mention the costumes aspect.” He’s referring specifically to the ad hoc outfits of small-time fighters — the flags worn as capes and the jury-rigged headdresses. “They are part of becoming another person, another character,” he says. “What’s the difference between that and a Marina Abramovic performance?”

The book sprang from Rolón’s striking January show, “Dzine: born, Carlos Rolón, 1970” at the **Paul Kasmin Gallery** (when Rolón was a graffiti artist, “Dzine” was his tag). It included bronze gloves, abstracted close-ups of gaudy designs for boxing trunks and a custom jewel-encrusted prize belt made in collaboration with the 94-year-old boxing-belt artisan **Sartonk**. The show highlighted the accoutrements of the sport — wraps, belts, shirts, gloves, trunks — but it wasn’t just about boxing. It was personal.



“Boxed: A Visual History and the Art of Boxing” by Dzine.

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“It was a love letter to my father,” Rolón says. “I connected with my father by spending time with him in the basement where he had his tools ... There was Puerto Rican diaspora energy. Besides the typical wood paneling and Schlitz beer signs, there was a Christmas garland up that never came down and candles for good luck. It brought a different energy. He always had the TV on watching Howard Cosell and NBC’s ‘Wide World of Sports.’ ” The artist meticulously recreated the basement for the Kasmin show.

Rolón’s previous show and book project was “**Nailed**” in 2011, which included an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago at which attendees could get their nails done for free in a replica of Rolón’s childhood living room. The two undertakings have more in common than meets the eye. If “Boxed” is about his father, “Nailed” was an homage to his mother, a supermarket cashier who made ends meet by opening up a beauty parlor in her home.

“My work is all about social and cultural identity,” Rolón says, “the dichotomy of being Puerto Rican and living in Chicago.” The **Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico** is planning a show based on “Boxed,” tentatively scheduled for next year.