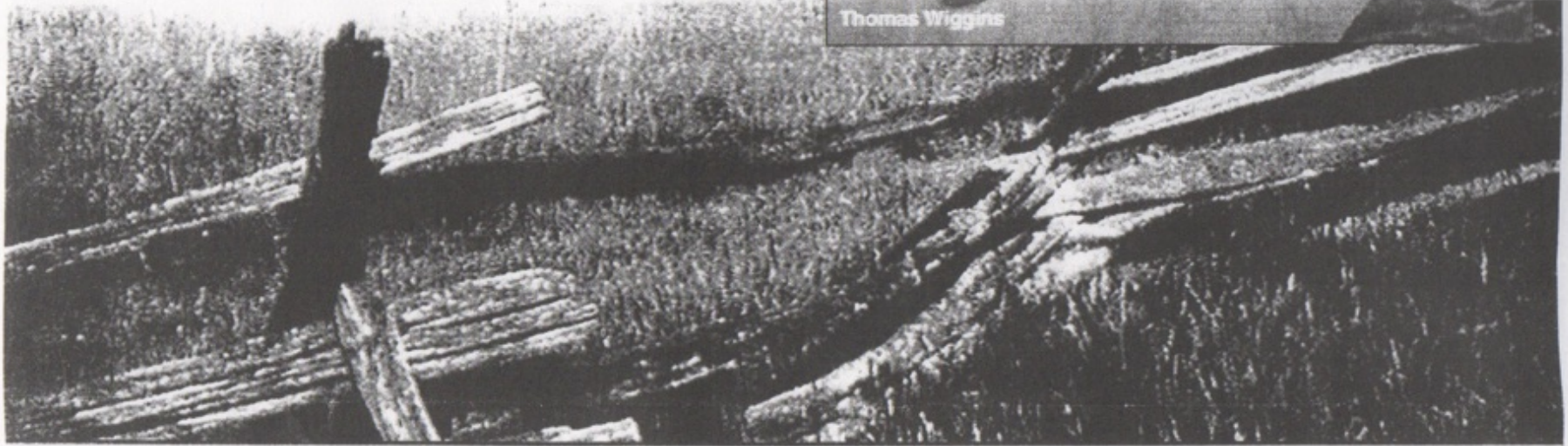


Thomas Wiggins



Titillating title distracts from Rivera play

Thoughtful, provocative work deserves full attention of audience

By Shirle Gottlieb
Special to the Press-Telegram

The world premiere of Jose Rivera's "References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot" is now playing on South Coast Repertory's Second Stage. What an unfortunate name for a serious piece of theater.

With such a kinky, titillating title, people may be misled into believing they will see a flippant, pop-culture comedy instead of the provocative subject which lies at the heart of this drama.

If you go with the wrong mind-set, if you have preconceived ideas of what to expect, you will spend too much energy getting your head on the right track. "Salvador Dali" is a thoughtful, risk-taking endeavor —

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one that deserves your full attention even though it is not wholly successful.

In essence, Rivera has written two separate plays running on parallel tracks that are in danger of collision. Let's call the first play "Cat and Coyote"; the second "Gabby and Benny." One meanders through the surreal dream world (think Cervantes, Dali, Calderon, di Chirico, Marquez — giants, one and all): the other cuts straight through the harsh reality of the desert (think Sam Shepard, Desert Storm, Waco, Texas).

All the action is set in the heat of Barstow, where Gabriela (Ana Ortiz) has discovered a surreal dream world to help her cope with her loneliness. For most of

PLEASE SEE 'DALI'/C2



Robert Montano, top, Ana Ortiz and Svetlana Efremova in a scene from "References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot." At right, Salvador Dali in 1964.

