

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Terra Incógnita, an exhibition of new paintings by Raul Guerrero, on view in New York at 520 W. 20th St. from April 25 through June 8. An opening reception will be held on Wednesday, April 24 from 6 to 8 PM. Guerrero will be joined by Gean Moreno, Director of the Knight Foundation Art + Research Center at ICA Miami, for an in-gallery conversation on Tuesday, April 30 at 11 AM in New York.

For over four decades, Guerrero has made work informed by his experiences navigating Southern California and northern Mexico as an American of Mexican ancestry paired with an abiding engagement in global art historical movements like Surrealism. Guerrero's work emerges from an interest in examining Southern California's connection to the continent at large, taking the form of visual and object-based references commonly found in the region.

In Terra Incógnita (Latin for "unknown lands"), the artist continues his depictions and critiques of the Americas, narrowing his focus to the southwestern United States, northern Mexico, and Peru. Across three new bodies of work, the exhibition uses sourced and remixed elements from appropriated political and art historical images to untangle the long trajectory of colonialism and cultural exchange typically found in this larger geographical footprint. Select works on view depict prominent figures included in historic narratives of Spain at the beginning of the Spanish conquest, while additional works consider social and autobiographical perspectives of place, immigration, and migration. As such, Guerrero imbues his signature brand of mythopoetic surrealism to chronicle the colonial legacies in the Americas.

A series of paintings consider the origins of the Spanish conquest in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In Fernando y Isabela: 1494 (2023), Guerrero foregrounds old-world Spanish portraiture commonly used to indicate status and power. The artist builds onto an image of the late fifteenth-century wedding of the King and

Queen of Spain—in which they sit opposite one another adorned in heavy gold Carcanet—by adding his own arrangement of papayas and a toucan. The fruit takes the place of crowns over their heads while the bird rests on Fernando’s shoulder. Guerrero’s playful additions to the original composition, which would have been opulent objects in the 1490s, signal an era of prosperity and imperial supremacy for Spain, a direct consequence of the country’s brutal force on the Americas that was sponsored in part by Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. Another work in this series, Son Seres Blancos (2023), utilizes speculative fiction to envision how Indigenous peoples received and disseminated information about the Spanish conquest across the Americas.

Maize is featured in several paintings and used as a prominent narrative device to explore its importance in Mexican American cuisine. For Guerrero, these works symbolically serve as a direct, material product of colonization. Abuelita (2024) is the artist’s reinterpretation of the iconic Diego Rivera painting, Woman Making Tortillas (1944). Here, he centers the process of making tortillas at home on a single individual, the grandmother, who is often portrayed as the holder and disseminator of generational knowledge. In The Lost Codex of Moctezuma (2024), he formally depicts how corn has imbued itself as an ancient and historical product over thousands of years—revealing the story of its domestication by Indigenous peoples in Southern Mexico and, in more current examples as seen in works such as Del Taco (2024), its over-commercialization in the Americas by fast food franchises. Across this body of work, Guerrero contemplates how maize has persevered as an inherently Mexican resource and how it was later appropriated by American culture.

Inspired by his grandfather’s resettling in Texas and his own upbringing between National City, California, and Tijuana, Mexico, the desert paintings on view consider the terrains and visual signifiers encountered on this journey and envision notions of a life to be lived in the United States. Yet, Guerrero’s brand of absurdism is on full display; he

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compounds mid-2000s Vanity Fair advertisements for luxury and commercial goods against painted, barren desert landscapes. Scenes of a car crash at the Wienerschnitzel, a cat crossing the street, and a figure eating a hamburger appear intrinsically as advertisements in billboard-like forms positioned at a tilt in the sand.

Across Terra Incógnita, Guerrero examines the ways in which iconography and narrative history have been reconfigured over the centuries. His work provides cultural and symbolic reference points to reconcile fact and fiction in the telling of colonial intervention. Rich with Guerrero's own subjective interpretation and detail, Terra Incógnita considers colonization's lasting imprint on American and Mexican American culture.

Raul Guerrero has been the subject of solo exhibitions at David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles (2021); Ortuzar Projects, New York (2018); Air de Paris (project space), Romainville, France (2014); Athenaeum Music and Arts Library, San Diego, California (2001, 2007, and 2013); CUE Art Foundation, New York (2010); Long Beach Museum of Art, California (1977); Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (1989); and San Francisco Art Institute, California (1977). Guerrero was included in the California Biennial 2022: Pacific Gold at the Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, California (2022–2023), and was the recipient of an NEA Photography Fellowship (1979) and the San Diego Art Prize (2006). Guerrero lives and works in San Diego.