

Cepeda, Gaby, "One Work: Raúl Guerrero's "Tomo VI: 16 De Septiembre Con 5 De Febrero," *Art in America Online*, March 14, 2022

Art in America

ONE WORK: RAÚL GUERRERO'S "TOMO VI: 16 DE SEPTIEMBRE CON 5 DE FEBRERO"

By Gaby Cepeda March 14, 2022 4:49pm



PHOTO OMAR OLGUIN/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GAGA MEXICO CITY

For Raúl Guerrero's first exhibition in Mexico, the veteran artist demonstrated his keen eye for urban environments via a series of paintings he made in 1994 to capture his experience in Mexico City. The paintings share the funny, fluid aesthetics of Mexican caricature and form a refreshingly peculiar narrative of the city, the long-mythologized, overgrown urban wilderness that sits at the center of the country. Each canvas includes stylized text drawn from the cover of one of many editions of *Historia y leyendas*

de las calles de México (History and Legends from the Streets of Mexico), a series of publications from the first half of the twentieth century that compiled the supernatural stories of sorry ghosts and weird tragedies that animated the city's streets during colonial reign. Although Guerrero's images are not quite ghostly nor eerie, their framing under that title does seem to elevate his personal accounts as a newcomer into scenes that supposedly speak to the city at large. It locates them within a collective experience.

The central painting on view at House of Gaga is *Tomo VI: 16 de Septiembre con 5 de Febrero*, whose title points to two streets, named for dates, that intersect at the corner of Mexico City's zocalo, a densely populated crossroads that Guerrero depicts in mostly blue and green hues. Guerrero's brushstrokes stay mostly broad, aqueous, and translucent in portraying the watchful mass at the forefront, including what looks like a family grasping each other's arms so as to not get separated in the crowd; the brushwork gets more intricate in the background, where thinner black lines delicately render the cathedral, and then looser again on the lilac-hued, ominous sky, captured in a strange light that makes it hard to pinpoint the time.

Most of Guerrero's painted locales and interactions remain recognizable today, even in a city that is constantly transforming; the crowds at the zocalo metro station remain tightly packed during rush hour, and a cloud of pollution still paints the sky weird colors. At the same time, the paintings feel like the stories and legends in the original publications—ghosts from another time. It is hard to keep a record of Mexico City's multitudes, but Guerrero's delightful portraits do a pretty decent job.