

# DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Fata Morgana, its first exhibition of paintings by Raul Guerrero. Featuring a selection of new and recent paintings, the exhibition will be on view July 17 through August 28, 2021.

Spending significant amounts of time in locations of specific interest, Guerrero approaches his subjects by sourcing and remixing elements that allow him to further excavate histories of place. This investigative approach is presented in the exhibition, where three bodies of work (largely grouped thematically by location: the Great Plains and the Black Hills of South Dakota, Latin America, and present-day Los Angeles and San Diego, California) address the myths and realities of the settlement of Southern California, specifically as a region where Native, Latin, and European American identities converge. For Guerrero, this collection of locations functions as a series of metaphors for examining his own Mestizo ancestry (of Spanish and Indigenous descent) and the various cultural environments in which he is embedded.

One new group of paintings emerged from a formative trip Guerrero took through the Great Plains to the Black Hills of South Dakota in the early 1990s. While there, Guerrero was struck by the realization of what he calls “place as an idea,” and the fact that his perception of the American West had long been informed by Hollywood’s representation of Indigenous peoples (such as the Oglala Sioux tribe) and images of South Dakotan saloons occupied by outlaws. Seen together, these works depict the scope of settler-colonial conflict between 1832 and 1885. Yet each painting functions as a singular vignette drawn from the quotidian world during an era rife with conflict and achieves its own autonomy as a multi-faceted picture of the social history of the Black Hills. Imbued with Guerrero’s signature brand of mythopoetic surrealism and incorporating appropriated art-historical images, the Black Hills works also reflect his interest in cinematic techniques like montage and, therefore, nod to the medium in which the artist was first introduced to these depictions.

The use of historical fiction is a prominent narrative device in a collection of works chronicling the colonial legacies of Latin America. As a child, Guerrero often traveled between National City, California, and Tijuana, Mexico, where he observed the visual- and object-based

contradictions of American and Mexican culture pushing up against the border. Confronted with these differing realities, Guerrero developed an interest in examining Southern California's connection to the continent at large, as well as the ways in which the region uniquely crystalizes the colonial experience observed around his home in National City. Drawing on this observation further, he began to research colonial legends as they appeared in an array of cultural forms. For example, a painting on view in this series imagines the shipwreck of the Spanish galleon *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, which sank in 1622 off the Florida Keys while en route to Spain from the empire's colonies in the Americas. Carefully portraying a speculative account of this vessel's holdings, the artist creates a portrait of the Spanish conquistadors through coveted objects lost at sea.

In another work, *Ataque de Una Diligencia* (1995 – 2021), Guerrero lovingly recreates appropriated imagery from an 1880s lithograph, adding an overlay of text that reads “FIN, Es Una Pelicula Mexican.” The use of “FIN” as a gesture to the ending of a film is a graphic element Guerrero frequently utilizes to demarcate—and critique—historical topics of interest. Here, he combines it with an image of a Mexican stagecoach under attack, a common scene in Western films popularized during the golden age of Mexican cinema. Appropriating the “FIN” title cards in his compositions, Guerrero visually creates a separation between his identity as an American of Mestizo ancestry and the institutionalized images of Mexican national identity—specifically, stereotypical imagery depicting Spanish colonial conquest and plunder.

Other works focus on the experience of contemporary life in Southern California, and in particular, life in Los Angeles and San Diego, California. Inspired by a biography of Spanish Mexican filmmaker Luis Buñuel (who often edited film scripts in bars), Guerrero began depicting artist-frequented bars across Southern California. *Chez Jay* in Santa Monica, *Hal's Bar and Grill* in Venice, *Musso and Frank's* in Hollywood, and *The Whaling Bar & Grill* in La Jolla, California all make appearances in Guerrero's pictures, designating these sites as locations of communion and reconciliation. The bar paintings represent Guerrero's own understanding of Los Angeles as representative of immigrant experiences in California—a place where stories of exile, displacement, and refuge have helped construct his own hybridized sense of belonging.

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Raul Guerrero (b. 1945, Brawley, California) has presented solo exhibitions at 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); and San Francisco Art Institute, California (1977). In 1989, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego presented a retrospective exhibition of his work. Guerrero has been the recipient of an NEA Photography Fellowship (1979) and the San Diego Art Prize (2006). He lives and works in San Diego, California.