DAVID
KORDANSKY
GALLERY

Raul Guerrero

Fata Morgana

July 17 – August 28, 2021

press@davidkordanskygallery.com
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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

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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.

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Raul Guerrero
Fata Morgana
July 17 – August 28, 2021

Raul Guerrero
Ataque de Una Diligencia,
1995 - 2021
oil on linen
80 x 108 x 1 1/2 inches
(203.2 x 274.3 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.027)

Raul Guerrero
Pebble Portrait: Canyon de Chelly,
2018
oil on linen
12 x 12 x 1 1/2 inches
(30.5 x 30.5 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.025)

Raul Guerrero
Portrait of Raymond Chandler at the Whaling Bar c. 1954: La Jolla, 2018
oil on linen
56 1/2 x 75 x 1 3/8 inches
(143.5 x 190.5 x 3.5 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.026)

Raul Guerrero
The Indian Guide (After AJ Miller),
2021
oil on linen
108 x 80 x 1 1/2 inches
(274.3 x 203.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.015)

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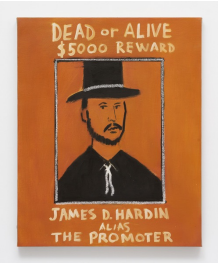


Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Wanted Poster - B, 2021
oil on linen
30 x 24 x 1 1/2 inches
(76.2 x 61 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.041)

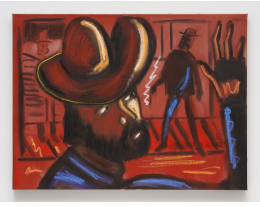
Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Bank Robber - B, 2021
oil on linen
16 x 18 x 1 1/2 inches
(40.6 x 45.7 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.034)

Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Bank Robber - A, 2021
oil on linen
24 x 16 x 1 1/2 inches
(61 x 40.6 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.049)

Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Highwayman - A, 2021
oil on linen
24 x 18 x 1 1/2 inches
(61 x 45.7 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.036)

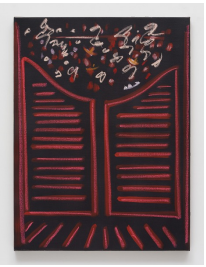
Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Custer, 2021
oil on linen
18 x 12 x 1 1/2 inches
(45.7 x 30.5 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.038)

Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Gold Nugget, 2021
oil on linen
18 x 24 x 1 1/2 inches
(45.7 x 61 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.035)



Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Gunfight,
2021
oil on linen
24 x 32 x 1 1/2 inches
(61 x 81.3 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.009)

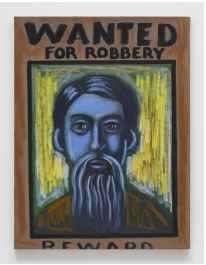
Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Wagon Wheel,
2021
oil on linen
24 x 40 x 1 1/2 inches
(61 x 101.6 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.037)



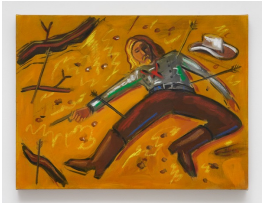
Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Saloon Doors,
2021
oil on linen
32 x 24 x 1 1/2 inches
(81.3 x 61 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.011)

Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Highwayman - B,
2021
oil on linen
20 x 24 x 1 1/2 inches
(50.8 x 61 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.048)

Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Prospector,
2021
oil on linen
14 x 18 x 1 1/2 inches
(35.6 x 45.7 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.010)



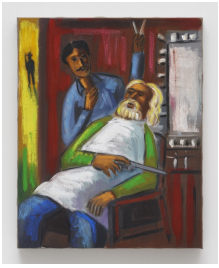
Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Wanted Poster - A,
2021
oil on linen
32 1/4 x 24 x 1 3/8 inches
(81.9 x 61 x 3.5 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.050)



Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Indian Attack,
2021
oil on linen
18 x 24 x 1 1/2 inches
(45.7 x 61 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.012)

Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Bar Room Brawl,
2021
oil on linen
32 x 24 x 1 1/2 inches
(81.3 x 61 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.047)

Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Buffalo Hunter,
2021
oil on linen
24 x 18 x 1 1/2 inches
(61 x 45.7 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.040)



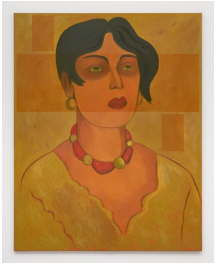
Raul Guerrero
The Black Hills c. 1880s: Barber Shop,
2021
oil on linen
20 x 16 x 1 1/2 inches
(50.8 x 40.6 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.013)

Raul Guerrero
Buffalo Hunt (After George Catlin),
2021
oil on linen
46 x 102 x 1 1/2 inches
(116.8 x 259.1 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.014)

Raul Guerrero
Chez Jay: Santa Monica, 2006
oil on linen
80 x 108 x 1 1/4 inches
(203.2 x 274.3 x 3.2 cm)
(Inv# RGU 20.223)

Raul Guerrero
Hot Dog: The Weinerschnitzel, 2006
oil on linen
70 x 80 x 1 1/2 inches
(177.8 x 203.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 20.231)

Raul Guerrero
Exile: The Untold Story of Francisco Madero, 2021
oil on linen
56 x 80 1/8 x 1 3/8 inches
(142.2 x 203.5 x 3.5 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.017)



Raul Guerrero
Portrait of Guadalupe Marin, 2021
oil on linen
76 x 60 x 1 1/2 inches
(193 x 152.4 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.016)

Raul Guerrero
The Wreck of Nuestra Señora de Atocha #1, 1998
oil on linen
42 x 80 x 1 1/2 inches
(106.7 x 203.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# RGU 21.032)

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RAUL GUERRERO

born 1945, National City, CA
lives and works in San Diego, CA

EDUCATION

1970 Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA

SELECTED SOLO / TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS
(* Indicates a publication)

2021 *Fata Morgana*, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Time and Place, William Leavitt & Raul Guerrero, curated by William Leavitt, Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Beverly Hills, CA

2020 *SONORAN DESERT: FLORA, FAUNA, ARTIFACTS*, Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, CA

2018 *An Abbreviated History of the Americas*, Potts Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Ortuzar Projects, New York, NY

2014 Air de Paris Gallery, Paris, France

2013 Manhattan Restaurant, La Jolla, CA
The Athenaeum Music & Arts Library, La Jolla, CA

2010 *CUE Art Foundation, New York, NY

2009 Eric Phleger Gallery, Encinitas, CA

2007 *The Whailing Bar,* The Athenaeum Music & Arts Library, La Jolla, CA

2006 Billy Shire Fine Arts, Culver City, CA

2004 Galleria Ninapi, Ravenna, Italy

2002 Hybrid Gallery, San Diego, CA

2001	*Location, Location, Location*, The Athenaeum Music & Arts Library, La Jolla, CA *Historia y Leyendas de Las Calles de Mexico, FIN Paintings, Mexican Petty Criminals*, Cerritos College Art Gallery, Norwalk, CA
1999	Molly Barnes Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
1998	Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA Porter Troupe Gallery, San Diego, CA
1995	Quint Gallery, La Jolla, CA Linda Moore Gallery, San Diego, CA
1994	Gallery 3770 Park Boulevard, San Diego, CA
1993	Linda Moore Gallery, San Diego, CA
1991	*Aspects of the Night Life in Tijuana*, David Zapf Gallery, San Diego, CA David Lewinson Gallery, San Diego, CA
1989	David Zapf Gallery, San Diego, CA Saxon-Lee Gallery, Los Angeles, CA Conlon-Moreno Gallery, Santa Fe, NM *Raul Guerrero Retrospective*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA
1988	*Recent Paintings and Sculptures*, Saxon-Lee Gallery, Los Angeles, CA David Zapf Gallery, San Diego, CA
1987	Saxon-Lee Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1986	Boehm Gallery, San Diego, CA USC Atelier, Santa Monica, CA
1985	Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1984	Patty Aande Gallery, San Diego, CA *New Work: Raul Guerrero & William Leavitt*, Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery, Los Angeles, CA Barbara Braathen Gallery, New York, NY

1982 Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, CA
Poet and Audience, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
Quint Gallery, La Jolla, CA

1981 Quint Gallery, La Jolla, CA

1979 Libra Gallery, Claremont, CA

1978 Thomas/Lewallen Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

1977 Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA
Raul Guerrero and Doug Metzler, Morgan Thomas, Santa Monica, CA

1976 Morgan Thomas at Claire Copley, Los Angeles, CA

1975 *Raul Guerrero and Lyn Horton*, San Jose State University Art Gallery, San Jose, CA

1974 Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

1969 Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
(* Indicates a publication)

2021 *The Beatitudes of Malibu,* David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Before Time Was Marked…, The Athenaeum Music & Arts Library, La Jolla, CA

2017 *A Universal History of Infamy*, LACMA, Los Angeles, CA

2016 *Recent Paintings by Katy Crowe, Raul Guerrero, Janet Jenkins and William Leavitt,* Honor Fraser, Los Angeles, CA

2012 **Behold America! Art of the United States*, Museum of contemporary Art San Diego, The San Diego Museum of Art, and Timken Museum, San Diego, CA
Museum of Art, San Diego, CA
Beyond the Border Gallery, San Diego, CA

Public Artists, Private Works, William D. Cannon Art Gallery, Carlsbad, CA
LARGE – Paintings of Wicked Adult, the Warehouse Gallery (ArtShare LA), Los Angeles, CA

2011 *Biily Shire Celebrates 25 Year*, La Luz de Jesus Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
The Experimental Impulse, REDCAT, Los Angeles, CA
She Accepts the Proposition : Women Gallerist and the Redefinition of Art in Los Angeles 1967-1978 (Pacific Standard Time), Sam Francis Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

2009 *Homing In: An Exhibition of 50 San Diego Artists*, Quint Contemporary, La Jolla, CA
Contemporary Still Life Painting, Cal State Fullerton, Fullerton, CA

2008 *Painting in Southern California: The 1980's Neo-Expressionism and Driven to Abstraction II*, Riverside Museum of Art, Riverside, CA
Innocence is Questionable, California Center for the Arts, Escondido, CA

2007 Gallery 5, San Diego, CA
Immigration, Sun Vallery Center for the Arts, Ketchum, ID
Raul Guerrero/ Yvonne Venegas, San Diego Art Prize, L Street Gallery, San Diego, CA

2006 *TRANSactions: Contemporary Latin American and Latino Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA
Strange New World: Art and Design from Tijuana, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA

2005 *Painted Ladies*, Cannon Art Gallery, Carlsbad, CA

2004 *Lateral Thinking: Art oft he 1990's*, Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH and Hood Museum (Darthmouth University), Hanover, NH

2002 *Lateral Thinking: Art of the 1990's*, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, CO
Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge, San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, Texas, Smithsonian Institution's Arts and Industries Building, Washington D. C.; El Paso Museum of Art, El Paso, Texas; Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis, IN; San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA; St. Louis Science Center, St. Louis, MO; Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, Chicago, IL; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA

"SD'80," Work by 12 artists, Flux Gallery, San Diego, CA
The 3rd Annual Invitational Drawing Show, Earl & Birdie Taylor Library, San Diego, CA

2001 *Lateral Thinking: Art of the 1990's*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego

2000 *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000*, Los Angeles, County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

1998 *Chairs, Plazas, Faces, Gardens, Rooms: Paintings by Robert Burtis, Raul Guerrero, Thomas Lawson, William Leavitt, Margaret von Biesen,* Curated by William Leavitt, Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

1997 *Primarily Paint*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA

1996 *Violencia*, Galleria Spagnolo, San Diego, CA

1995 *Common Ground / A Regional Exhibition*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA
An exhibition by Raul Guerrero, William Leavitt, Allen Ruppersberg, Gallery 3770 Park Boulevard, San Diego, CA

1994 *La Loteria*, Iturralde Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Land, Terrain, San Francisco, CA
**XicanoRicorso: A Thirty Year Retrospect from Aztlan,* Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
La Frontera/The Border: Art About the-Mexico/United States Border Experience, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA
La Frontera, Neuberger Museum of Art, SUNY, NY
La Frontera, Scottsdale Center for the Arts, Scottsdale, AZ
Frontera/The Border: Art About the Mexico/United States Border-La *Experience*, Museum of Contemporary Art/Centro Cultural de la Raza, San Diego, CA
*La Frontera,*Centro Cultural Tijuana, Tijuana, Mexico
La Frontera, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA

1992 *From the Studio: Recent Painting and Sculpture by 20 California Artists,* The Oakland Museum, Oakland, CA

1990 *Gallery Artists 1990*, David Zapf Gallery, San Diego, CA
Daniel Saxon Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Border Issues, Rivikin Gallery, Lancaster, OH

1989 *Lannan Acquisitions*, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA

1987 *Phoenix Biennale*, Phoenix, AZ

1985 *The Eclectic Cat*, Museum of Natural History, San Diego, CA
To the Astonishing Horizons, curated by Peter Frank, L.A.V.A. Landscape Exhibition, Los Angeles, CA
A San Diego Exhibition: Forty-Two Emerging Artists, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA

1984 *The Eclectic Cat*, Museum of Natural History, San Diego, CA
To the Astonishing Horizons, L.A.V.A. Landscape Exhibition, Curator: Peter Frank, Los Angeles, CA
A San Diego Exhibition: Forty-Two Emerging Artists, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA

1979 *Second Annual Tokyo Festival*, Tokyo, Japan
Photographic Directions, Security Pacific Bank, Los Angeles, CA
Invitational Photography Exhibition, MOMA P.S. 1, New York, NY

1978 *Hallwalls*, Buffalo, NY
Sculpture '78: Los Angeles Street Scene, Los Angeles, CA
Contemporary California Photography, Cameraworks Gallery, San Francisco, CA

1977 *100 + Current Directions in Southern California*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
L.A., San Francisco Art Institute Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Photographs by Southern California Painters and Sculptors, College of Creative Studies Gallery, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA

1976 Santa Monica College Art Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

1975 Tortue Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

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AWARDS

2006	San Diego Art Prize
1979	National Endowment for the Arts, Photography Fellow

PUBLIC ART PROJECTS

2000	Maiastra Fountain, Golden Springs Development Co., San Fe Springs, CA
1997	City of Carlsbad, CA
1999	Balboa Park Activity Center, San Diego, CA, Rob Quigley, Architect
1994	Sherman Heights Community Center, San Diego, CA Rob Quigley, Architect
1993	Community Redevelopment Agency for the City of Los Angeles, Grand Hope Park, Lawrence Halprin, Landscape Architect

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(* Indicates non-periodical book, catalog, or other publication)

2021 Durón, Maximilíano, "With His Heartfelt Paintings, Artist Raul Guerrero Searches for His Place in the World," *ARTnews.com*, June 15, 2021
Mitchell, Rory, "Advisory Selections at Art Basel OVR: Portals," *Ocula.com*, June 15, 2021
Guerrero, Raul, "Nine Pages," *Hotel #7*, Spring 2021, p. 195
Mackin-Solomon, Ashley, "Whaling Bar to return to La Jolla's La Valencia Hotel," *LaJollaLight.com*, June 4, 2021
Diner, Eli, "Five Los Angeles Shows to See This Month," *CulturedMag.com*, March 1, 2021

2020 Campbell, Andy, "Raul Guerrero," *Artforum*, May/June 2020
Candice, "Dazzling Outdoor Art Around San Diego," *blog.sandiego.org*, July 8, 2020

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Li, Jennifer, S., “Duchamp in the Desert: the Surrealist Synthesis of Raul Guerrero,” *Frieze*, issue 2010, February 12, 2020

2018 Guerrero, Raul, “Manu of the Future,” *Hotel #5*, 2018, pp. 91-99
Diner, Eli, “The Mask and the Motor,” *Flash Art,* October 2018
Schwendener, Martha, Will Heinrich and Jillian Steinhauer, ‘What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week,” *The New York Times*, July 20, 2018, p. C9
“Raul Guerrero at Ortuzar Projects, New York,” *ARTnews.com*, July 12, 2018
Jones, Mary, “A Multifaceted Career: Raul Guerrero talks with Mary Jones,” *artcritical.com,* July 3, 2018
Larkin, Daniel, “Tribeca Art Spaces Yearn for Love in the Time of Cholera,” *Hyperallergic.com*, June 25, 2018
Dafoe, Taylor, “Dealer Ales Ortuzar Ups the Ante in Tribeca,” *CulturedMag.com*, June 21, 2018
Mackin-Solomon, Ashley, “New La Jolla Mural Toasts Raymond Chandler, Whaling Bar,” *LaJollaLight.com*, March 28, 2018

2013 **Behold America! Art of the United States from Three San Diego Museums*, San Diego: Museum of contemporary Art San Diego and Timken Museum, San Diego, CA, 2013

2012 **Behold, America! Art of the United States from Three San Diego Museums*, San Diego: The San Diego Museum of Art,
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Timken Museum of Art, 2012, p. 339

2010 **Raul Guerrero*, curated by Allen Ruppersberg, New York: Cue Art Foundation, 2011

2009 Pincus, Robert L., “Quint gallery homes in on local artists,” *Courant.com*, May 24, 2009

2007 *Freeman, Judith, “Raul Guerrero, The Whaling Bar: La Jolla,” The Athenaeum Music & Arts Library, September 26, 2007

2006 Jagoda, Barry, “UCSD Visual Artists Recognized with New Prize for Excellence,” *UCSDnews.uscd.edu*, September 25, 2006

2004 *Guerrero and the Art of Visual Narrative*, text by Heather Kuhn, San Diego: UC San Diego, 2004

1998 **Raul Guerrero, Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies*, with text by Toby Kamps, San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 1998
"Guerrero goes solo in career overview," *The San Diego Union - Tribune*, July 24, 1998

1995 Knight, Christopher, "Guerrero's art comes close to B-movie mysticism," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, June 2, 1995, p. E5
Pincus, Robert, L., "Symbolic journeys to places of intrigue," *The San Diego Union - Tribune*," February 12, 1995

1994 Mantilla, Ruiz, and M. Mora, "Pinto Para los Que No Podemos Levantarnos," *El País Edición*, 1994

1991 Pincus, Robert, L. "Paintings Depict Vitality of Tijuana Night Life," *The San Diego Union*, 1991
Pincus, Robert, L., "Raul Guerrero at David Zapf," *Art in America*, September 1991

1989 Ollman, Leah, "Artist's Stardom Didn't Come Out of Nowhere," *The Los Angeles Times*, 1989
"Raul Guerrero," *Visions Art Quarterly*, Fall 1989
Campbell, Andy, "Raul Guerrero," *Artforum.com*, 1989
"Raul Guerrero, a Native of Southern California," *Visions Art Quarterly*, 1989
Allman, Kevin, "La Vida Nocturna," *Los Angeles Times*, 1989, p. 107-108
Pincus, Robert, L., "Series of Pictures of Tijuana, Venice seem to be…," *The San Diego Union*, 1989
Wilson, William, "Armory Center in Pasadena's Old Town Is Ready to Open : Art: The Art Workshops group has finally found a home, but its inaugural exhibition there presents an uneven mix of Southland artists.," *LATimes.com*, November 2, 1989
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Freudenheim, Susan, "Raul Guerrero," *Artforum*, Summer, 1989
Pincus, Robert, L., "Raul Guerrero at Kuhlenschmidt," *Art in America*, February 1986

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Durón, Maximilíano, “With His Heartfelt Paintings, Artist Raul Guerrero Searches for His Place in the World,” *ARTnews.com*, June 15, 2021

ARTnews

With His Heartfelt Paintings, Artist Raul Guerrero Searches for His Place in the World

By Maximilíano Durón | June 15, 2021

Raul Guerrero in his Los Angeles studio, 2021. PHOTO: ELON SCHOENHOLZ/COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

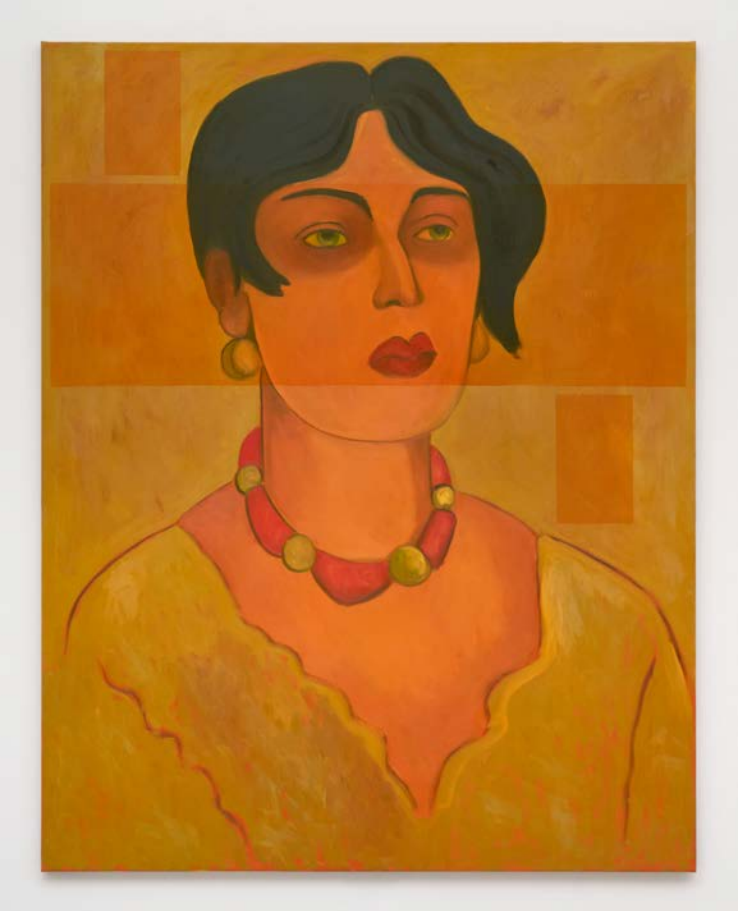
For much of his life, artist Raul Guerrero has thought about his place in the world. He was born and raised in National City, California, a coastal town that’s part of the San Diego metropolitan region. After a year studying art at a local community college, Guerrero, then only 19, began hitchhiking through Mexico, from Tijuana to the Yucatan Peninsula, hoping that his ancestral homeland might offer some answers.

“I was looking for myself, you might say,” Guerrero recently recalled during an interview with ARTnews. “As a Mexican American, I never really felt like I belonged anywhere, culturally speaking. I thought maybe Mexico will be the place. Over the years, I’ve realized Mexico is not my country—my country’s the U.S. At the same time, my affinity to this country was blocked off because of the cultural environment that was very Eurocentric and Anglo-centric.”

This quest has informed his art practice in the years since his first visit to Mexico in the mid-1960s. Guerrero said that a set of underlying questions guiding his practice are: “Where do I belong? What am I about? What’s the context that I came out of?”

Guerrero’s artistic journey will be the subject of a forthcoming solo exhibition opening in July at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles, which has added the artist to its roster. (The gallery will also offer six works by Guerrero as part of Art Basel’s “OVR: Portals,” which launches on June 16.) For his forthcoming show at the gallery, Guerrero has created a suite of entirely new paintings in varying sizes. When we spoke by Zoom in May, they lined the walls of his L.A. studio. A majority of them are inspired by earlier works that he had painted over at some point—he felt that they weren’t where he wanted them to be in terms of technique. He sees this part of the show as a “synopsis” of sorts of his previous explorations.

Durón, Maximilíano, “With His Heartfelt Paintings, Artist Raul Guerrero Searches for His Place in the World,” *ARTnews.com*, June 15, 2021



Raul Guerrero’s *Portrait of Guadalupe Marin* (2021) is a re-creation of Diego Rivera’s portrait of his second wife, Marin. It will be include in his upcoming show at David Kordansky Gallery. PHOTO: ELON SCHOENHOLZ/COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

“His work is an exploration of Los Angeles as a hyper-complex and diverse space,” dealer David Kordansky said. “For the show, he’s not only mapping the invention of California, in particular Southern California, but he’s creating these bridges between where the Indigenous and the Northern Mexican collide.”

Some of the pieces are Guerrero’s own take on historical fiction, “a reconciling of fact and fiction to create a representation of the things that I’m thinking about,” he said. Two paintings imagine the shipwreck of the Spanish galleon *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, which sank during a 1622 hurricane off the Florida Keys while en route to Spain from the empire’s colonies in the Americas. Guerrero envisions it as seen from the ocean floor, with the ship’s treasures on full view. “When it sank,” Guerrero said, “in my mind, this is what happened.”

Another new painting, *Exile: The Untold Story of Francisco Madero* (2021), depicts a revolutionary who initiated the Mexican Revolution in 1911 but was assassinated in 1913. Guerrero also has a personal connection to Madero; his maternal grandfather grew up and worked on Madero’s estate until he moved to the United States in 1896. In the painting, Madero is seated at a desk looking at what appears to be a pre-Colombian statue but is actually a trinket that Guerrero bought in Tijuana. Hanging above Madero is a portrait of the revolutionary. “This is sort of a fictional figure that *could be* Francisco Madero,” he said.

Other works are direct copies of work by likes of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, including a portrait by Rivera of his second wife Guadalupe Marin. Scenes by white American artists, like Alfred Jacob Miller and George Catlin, who painted Native Americans in the Great Plains region, are also appropriated. One of those paintings recasts an image of a buffalo hunt by Catlin, which Guerrero appropriated to highlight the U.S. government’s “outright attempt to create a genocide against the Indigenous population by eliminating their food source, which is the buffalo,” he told me. While making that work, he asked himself: “What do we *really* know about history?”

In his family growing up, Guerrero said, “there was always some sort of artistic sensibility going that I think affected the way I see the world.” That didn’t necessarily make him believe he would be an artist, even though an older brother and a cousin were both artistically inclined. During the summers as a teen, Guerrero’s parents sent him to pick grapes to earn some money. Around that time, he started thinking about what he might do with his life and came to the conclusion that he wanted to be an artist.

After high school, Guerrero enrolled at Southwestern College in the nearby city of Chula Vista to study visual arts, where he had John

Durón, Maximilíano, “With His Heartfelt Paintings, Artist Raul Guerrero Searches for His Place in the World,” *ARTnews.com*, June 15, 2021

Raul Guerrero, *Las Indias*, 2006. PHOTO: ELON SCHOENHOLZ/COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Baldessari as a professor. Guerrero didn’t get the best of grades and soon left school for his sojourn throughout Mexico. After he had traveled much of the country, he returned to Mexico City and took classes in ceramics at the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes for a few months.

Upon his return to the U.S. in 1964, at the height of the Vietnam War, Guerrero learned that a draft notice had been waiting for him. If he wasn’t enrolled in a U.S. school, it said, he would have to report for basic training. Guerrero’s cousin was already a student at the legendary Chouinard Art Institute in L.A., and suggested he apply for a spot. It was a gambit that paid off: Guerrero was accepted, and avoided being drafted.

In 1969, the year before he graduated from Chouinard, Guerrero questioned what he wanted to do as an artist. He found an answer in Marcel Duchamp, whose famed 1963 retrospective he saw at the Pasadena Art Museum. Guerrero began making installations reliant upon ready-made objects. A sculptural installation comprising a body cast of the artist (made in collaboration with Ed Kienholz) and other elements, an installation resembling an inverted nylon pyramid, and a sculpture in which a Yaqui mask was mounted to a motor that rotated it at 15 rpms count among Guerrero’s earliest mature works. Then, after a little over a decade, Guerrero’s work moved in an entirely different direction.

“Eventually I began thinking that I needed a different way of expressing my thoughts, because the given object has limitations—it’s not as plastic as something that you might create, like a painting,” he said. “I needed something that would allow me to introduce color, form, movement, and narrative.”

In 1984, Guerrero returned to Oaxaca and rented a studio space there for six months, during which time he taught himself painting. Though he had gone to one of the most respected art schools in the U.S., Chouinard was more focused on an artwork’s ideas than its aesthetics, so he had never learned painting techniques.

When he arrived at the bed and breakfast he was to stay at in Oaxaca, another artist was finishing up his own stay in the inn’s studio.

Guerrero asked him, “How do you get started with a painting?”

To which the fellow artist replied, “Well, you work from the back forward.”

“That’s all he said, nothing else,” Guerrero recalled.

Durón, Maximilíano, “With His Heartfelt Paintings, Artist Raul Guerrero Searches for His Place in the World,” *ARTnews.com*, June 15, 2021

Raul Guerrero, *Chinle*, 2021. PHOTO: JEFF MCLANE/COURTESY DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

So Guerrero bought his painting materials and books that focused on technique and just began experimenting on the canvas. It took him about two months “to get into the swing of things.”

The paintings he created there became an examination of Oaxaca, his own personal interpretation of the city based on his time there and the conversations he had with the area’s residents. In one painting, a pre-Colombian pyramid is rendered bright red and surrounded by various lush flora and fauna. In another, an Indigenous mask is pictured floating in mid-air in a blue forest as a bullfrog looks on.

This approach became one that Guerrero relied upon often: make paintings about a certain place based on time spent there, mixed with fantastical elements that further excavate its history. Other locales he took as his subject matter were Venice and Tijuana, and after completing those, he soon set out to Iowa, which he thought “would be like going back in time and seeing the authentic Anglo before he comes out to California,” he said.

On his way back to California from Iowa, he ended up in the Black Hills of the Dakotas, where he realized that everything that he knew about this place came from the movies, typically Westerns. He quickly began creating art about this place as well.

“Up until that point, the Black Hills seemed to be more mythical than real,” he said. “But once there, I’m in that reality. It introduced me to this idea that our reality is informed by the media, and then that’s the way we filter our history.”

One of the bodies of work Guerrero is presenting at Kordansky this summer features images of people at bars. “When you go to a bar and sit there, you have a drink and commiserate about life,” he said. Among those paintings is a portrait of the bartender Ruben Rueda, who worked at the famed Hollywood restaurant Musso & Frank Grill for 50 years before he died in 2019.

But these paintings are not merely bar scenes—they’re also far more than that. This body of work, taken together with the other works that will feature in the show, represents Guerrero’s attempt to map what he views as the real history of Southern California, accounting for the region’s first Indigenous populations and the Spanish conquistadors, as well as the region’s relationship to both Mexico and the white settlers who arrived there as part of Manifest Destiny. Speaking of the people who attend these watering holes, Guerrero said, “It’s the historical images that created them, that gave them their contexts. You turn around, and you can see that history in the beyond.”

And has Guerrero figured out where he belongs in that beyond? “Absolutely, I settled that about yesterday,” he said with a laugh. Then he got serious and said he came to the realization somewhere between five and eight years ago. “I’m not Mexican, but at the same time I’m not Anglo. I’m a hybrid that lives in this country, and I embrace it fully.”

Mitchell, Rory, “Advisory Selections at Art Basel OVR: Portals,” *Ocula.com*, June 15, 2021

OCULA

Advisory Selections at Art Basel OVR: Portals

By Rory Mitchell | June 15, 2021

Running between 16 and 19 June 2021, OVR: Portals is the first curator-led edition of Art Basel’s Online Viewing Rooms, with Magali Arriola, Christina Li, and Larry Ossei-Mensah at the helm. Ocula Advisory present a selection of fair highlights.

Raul Guerrero at David Kordansky Gallery

Raul Guerrero, *Las Indias* (2006). Oil on linen. 142.24 x 203.2 x 3.81 cm. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery.

In anticipation of Raul Guerrero’s first solo presentation with David Kordansky Gallery opening in July 2021, the artist is being featured with the gallery at OVR: Portals.

Drawing on his personal experience navigating U.S. culture as a person of Mexican ancestry, Guerrero’s paintings address the shifting cultural landscape of the American Southwest, containing a range of popular and art-historical references.

Diner, Eli, “Five Los Angeles Shows to See This Month,” *CulturedMag.com*, March 3, 2021

CULTURED

Five Los Angeles Shows to See This Week

By Eli Diner | March 3, 2021

RAUL GUERRERO, “*STILL LIFE WITH SARAPE AND CRYSTAL BALL*,” 2012, ON VIEW AT MARC SELWYN FINE ART IN LOS ANGELES.

William Leavitt and Raul Guerrero, “Time and Place” at Marc Selwyn Fine Art

Raul Guerrero and William Leavitt are exemplars of a brand of art from the 1970s sometimes called California Conceptualism, a shaggy post-medium approach that drew on surrealism, popular culture and the Los Angeles dreamscape with a wry sense of humor. Curated by Leavitt, best known for his eerie tableaux of suburban Southern California domestic interiors, the exhibition offers a presentation of mostly recent paintings by these not-so-recent friends. Leavitt’s works, whether on paper or canvas, collage imagery of the Western landscape, built environment and interior details, rendered in a muted illustrational style. After working predominantly in sculpture, installation and photography since the early 1980s, Guerrero has devoted himself to painting. The selection of his works here comes, with one or two exceptions, from the past decade: still lifes, landscapes, a bar scene and film still. The cumulative effect is a historical phantasmagoria mixing indigenous American objects and modernist icons, Spanish Golden Age painting and Mexican Golden Age cinema, five centuries of narrative and counter-narrative that end at the bottom of glass in La Jolla.

Campbell, Andy, "Raul Guerrero," *Artforum*, May/June 2020, p. 177

Raul Guerrero

KAYNE GRIFFIN CORCORAN

In 1989, Raul Guerrero visited Canyon de Chelly, a site where Ancestral Puebloans built spectacular dwellings among sheer rock escarpments, and where, nearby, dozens of Diné families continue to live (the United States holds the land in trust for the Navajo Nation). It is a knee-buckling place. Guerrero encountered the striking rock formations and petroglyphs left by the canyon's many inhabitants over thousands of years—Ancestral Puebloans, Hopi, then Diné. Canyon de Chelly's natural and man-made features are instantly recognizable from commonly reproduced photographs by Ansel Adams and Edward S. Curtis. Both photographers participated in the mythification of the Southwest as a place of dramatic voids—geological, but also anthropological (lest we forget Curtis's *The Vanishing Race—Navajo*, a 1904 photograph of indigenous people riding off into a perspectival point of no return). While visiting this storied place, Guerrero, who has written of his ancestral connection to the Yaqui and Tarahumara (now living in the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sonora), gathered together a group of multicolored stones and arranged them in an ersatz happy face, taking a photograph of his creation for posterity. This gesture, which can be understood as an irreverent (and some might say disrespectful) extension of the iconic pictographs in the canyon, matches the tone of much of the artist's work made in the intervening years, which often negotiates (or at least articulates) the distance between artifact and artifice. Guerrero twists Sonoran kitsch—the flotsam of an economy built on nonindigenous tourist demands for "authentic" indigenous images and objects—into a sublime visual précis of his moment.

In the years since Guerrero's trip, this smiley face has appeared in several of his paintings, including two that were on display in the artist's first exhibition with Kayne Griffin Corcoran. *Canyon de Chelly, Arizona* (all works cited, 2019), a nine-foot-tall painting of the rock arrangement, revisits the artist's 1989 gesture with a kind of ironic reverence—pitting the painting's grand size against the small, temporary, and informal gathering of stones. The smiley face is easier to miss in *A Desert Road*, but it's there, on the ground, pictured between a winsome, classically rendered European nude and a kachina (wearing a mask representing a bear) locked in a de Chirico–esque *High Noon* standoff. Blooming saguaro, a frog, a roadrunner, a Walmart truck, and a line of black ants also populate the scene of this supremely weird and satisfying painting. Acknowledging both the spiritual and economic realities of the Sonoran Desert, where semitrucks haul goods back and forth on the east-west route of highways such as US 60, Guerrero points out where the stereotypical romance of the desert meets the dystopia of consumer capitalism.

Raul Guerrero, *A Desert Road*, 2019, oil on linen, 80 × 108".

Building on the artist's impish wit were a series of three mechanically spinning tondos, painted in the style of Mimbres pottery. Guerrero has long deployed rotation as a key strategy of his practice, first with his replica of Marcel Duchamp's *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)*, 1920, which he made while an art student at Los Angeles's Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts), then in *Rotating Yaqui Mask*, 1973, and again, more than forty years later, in the series "Rotating Native Americans," 2015–16, a series of laminated digital prints that can be mounted onto a record player–like device. The last work again invokes Duchamp, riffing on his kinetic Rotoreliefs of 1935/1953. Whereas Duchamp's rotations facilitated what he termed "retinal" art, Guerrero's applications are closer to Georg Baselitz's upside-down paintings, which defamiliarize the artist's otherwise representational images. Guerrero's revolving paintings here were spare and droll. *Mimbres: Road Runner and Coyote*, for example, invoked the eternally dueling duo of *Looney Tunes* fame with a petroglyph-ish coyote and an illustrated roadrunner moving in opposite directions. Turning at a lethargic 6 rpm, the coyote and roadrunner appear to be locked in a race without resolution. As demonstrated here and throughout this compact and potent exhibition, Guerrero's love for the absurd mediates his understanding of the human and animal ecologies of the Southwest.

—*Andy Campbell*

Li, Jennifer S., “Duchamp in the Desert: the Surrealist Synthesis of Raul Guerrero,” *Frieze*, April 2020, Issue 210

FRIEZE

Duchamp in the Desert: the Surrealist Synthesis of Raul Guerrero

At Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, the artist’s paintings of the Sonoran desert span millennia of cultural references

By Jennifer S. Li | April 2020

Raul Guerrero, ‘*Sonoran Desert - Flora, Fauna, Artifacts*’, 2019. Courtesy: Flying Studio, Los Angeles

When Raul Guerrero was growing up in Southern California in the 1940s and ’50s, the US–Mexico border was more porous than it is today, and he would often drive with his family across the Sonoran Desert – a habit the artist continued into adulthood. The septuagenarian’s latest body of work, ‘Sonoran Desert: Flora, Fauna, Artifacts’, comprises surrealist paintings that, in places, evoke the crisp sure-handedness of René Magritte and, in others, the dreamlike filigree of Leonora Carrington. It unfolds through the loose construct of a road trip, albeit a non-linear journey that explores the artist’s multivalent Mexican–American identity and disparate artistic and cultural influences.

On weekly childhood visits to Tijuana, Guerrero was exposed to both Mexican folk handicrafts and cheap marketplace kitsch. At home in Southern California, there were Hollywood movies, surf culture, low riders and beatniks, as well as the art of John Baldessari and Ed Ruscha. In the 1970s, he was schooled in the mostly white, Eurocentric tradition at Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts). *A Desert Road* (all works 2019) envisages Guerrero’s cultural heritage and art-school pedigree as a roadside duel between a traditional Yei Bi Chei, the spirit god of the Navajo nation, and a classical nude. The Yei Bi Chei wears a grimacing wolf mask as he shakes a gourd rattle at the languorous Venus. Like the trail of ants marching across the bottom of the canvas, Guerrero shuttles between seemingly opposing aspects of his experience, synthesizing European and Indigenous, Mexican and American, traditional and avant-garde influences.

In a series of spinning circular paintings inspired by Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Rotoreliefs’ (1935/1953), Guerrero activates symbols from the prehistoric Hohokam and Mimbres societies, who once lived in portions of the Sonoran Desert. Inverting the Duchampian attempt to enhance the two-dimensional into three, Guerrero’s spinning works distil two entities into one. In *Mimbres: Road Runner and Coyote and Mimbres: Tortoise and Hare*, each symbol is reliant on the other for meaning: the tortoise is only slow because the hare is fast. As the paintings spin, the hunter is no longer discernible from the hunted, the beginning indistinguishable from the end.

At four and a half metres long and nearly a metre wide, *Apache Trail* unfurls like a vast comic strip. A petroglyph-like coyote gives chase to a roadrunner against a sparse landscape of cacti and roadside litter; a billboard advertises a hamburger and fries. In the centre, an idiosyncratic message in a bottle signals Guerrero’s interest in the transmission of information between people and cultures across time. The Apache Trail, today a popular scenic tourist drive, was originally used by the Apache people to cross the Superstition Mountains, before it became a stagecoach road and, finally, incorporated into Highway 60. Guerrero’s anachronistic references all return to the origins of the American West, though sometimes in strange, circuitous ways.

Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, which almost fills the gallery’s back wall, records a pseudo-artefact Guerrero made while at Canyon de Chelly National Park in 1989. In a nonchalant gesture, the artist rearranged some colourful stones into a smiley face, which he then captured in a photograph. Thirty years later, however, Guerrero has come to believe that he was channelling his Indigenous ancestors. Behind his monumental painting of this act lies a humble wish: that someone might one day encounter the rock smiley face, like that message in a bottle, and carry on the cycle of cultural transmission.

Raul Guerrero, ‘*Sonoran Desert - Flora, Fauna, Artifacts*’, 2019. Courtesy: Flying Studio, Los Angeles

Diner, Eli, "The Mask and the Motor," *Flash—Art.com*, October 3, 2018

Flash Art

The Mask and the Motor

By Eli Diner | October 3, 2018

Raul Guerrero, *Hot Dog Portrait: The Weinerschnitzel*, 2005

Around 1968 Raul Guerrero purchased a Yaqui ceremonial mask from a dealer in indigenous artifacts (and purported warlock) working out of an apartment in the McArthur Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. Guerrero, then a student at the Chouinard Art Institute, was under the impression that his grandfather had been Yaqui, and he saw the mask as a kind of personal curio. A carved wooden human face painted black, its features are simplified and exaggerated: a wide sharp nose, fanning ears, teeth that jut down into a parted mouth, and a pair of twisted goat horns that splay upward from the forehead. In 1973, now working under a Duchampian influence and a reading diet of Carl Jung, Lévi-Strauss, and Margaret Mead, Guerrero returned to the mask, considering it in relationship to archetypes, primary images, and the readymade. He remembers reading a passage in *Foundations of Modern Art* in which Amédée Ozenfant argues that the removal of native artifacts from their original context depletes them of their significance. Guerrero took the mask, rigged it up with a motor and a foot pedal, and affixed it to the wall; stepping on the pedal sets the mask spinning at fifteen rotations per minute.

Rotating Yaqui Mask offers a corrective to Ozenfant: the meaning of an object is always in motion, turned upside down and sideways, made and remade again. As an experiment in reanimation it is droll and weirdly beautiful, but there is also something plaintive in these steady revolutions and mechanical whir. The motor, too, is a simple artifact of its moment, no less archetypal for being unseen. The mask and the motor — they measure a distance, spatial and temporal, a span characterized, of course, by violence but equally by the ceaseless transformation and hybridization of cultures. The vagaries of history and geography dramatized by *Rotating Yaqui Mask* have marked a recurrent theme in Guerrero's thinking and artmaking over more than four decades — history, that is, as a process of perpetual revision, place as always mediated by narrative, imagery, myth, and imagination.

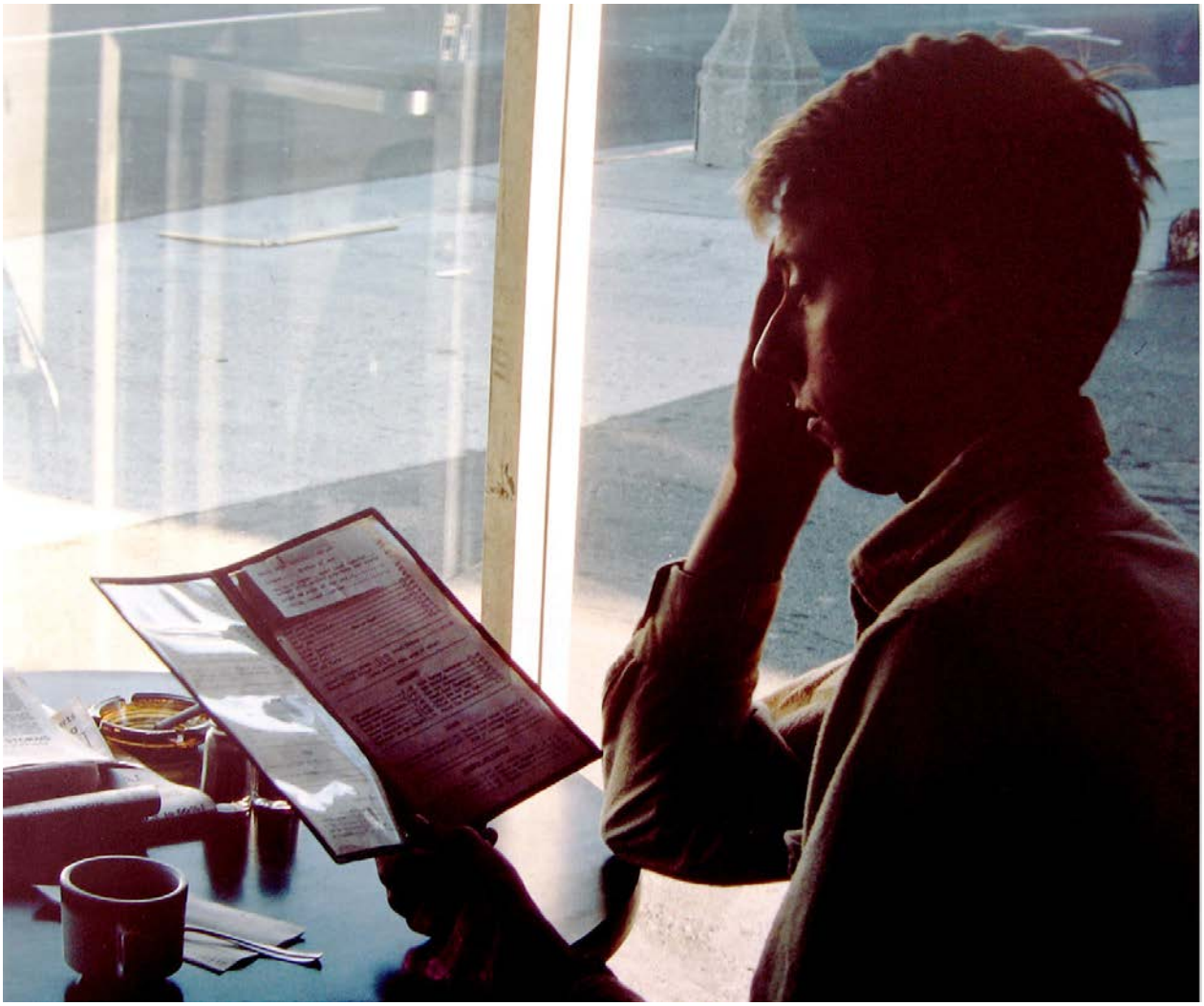
In conversations with Guerrero, this sense of place and past is palpable. He recounts his family history and his development as an artist almost as a sequence of points on a map, a geo-narrative stretching from Chihuahua and Sonora through Southern California to Europe and back, across several neighborhoods in Los Angeles, and filtered through references to history, books, films, and art — as much a consideration of the idea of each location as of his experiences there. The grandson of immigrants from Mexico, Guerrero was born in 1945 in Blythe, California, in the Palo Verde Valley, a farming region beside the Colorado River in the desert between Los Angeles and Phoenix. His father would drive workers to and from the fields, a kind of lower managerial role in the local agricultural economy. When school ended each year, they would load up a flatbed truck and drive north to the San Joaquin Valley to work the summer season: a childhood tracing a line up and down California's breadbasket interior, a world apart from the emerging popular mythology of the state. When Guerrero was eleven, the family moved to National City, a working-class suburb south of San Diego. There his father worked construction, and his mother opened a hair salon, launching the family into the middle class. In National City Guerrero encountered a world of surfing, car culture, and hamburgers from Jack in the Box, set to a soundtrack by Rosie and the Originals. The timbre of the place was equally determined by its proximity to the border, with Tijuana just minutes away. This zone of cultural crosscurrents was encapsulated in the treasures proffered by Mexican kitsch artisans: velvet paintings, plaster of Paris casts of *The Last Supper*. "That was our Metropolitan Museum," he says.

Guerrero speaks of the effect of border life on one’s perception of the world, proposing a particular attention to the ways images travel and their meanings shift in transit, a sensibility he sees exemplified in the work of John Baldessari, also from National City, with whom Guerrero studied during a stint at Southwestern College in San Diego in 1964. In his own work, we glimpse this interest in border-crossing not only in the frequent depictions of places he’s traveled — Tijuana, Oaxaca, Morocco, Berlin — but also, significantly, those he hasn’t. *Vuelo Mundial* (1976) is a three-minute film comprised of a found photograph of a DC-7 airplane in flight and a soundtrack of the groaning piston engine of a DC-7, purchased from a Hollywood sound library. Every few seconds the Spanish name of a city appears on screen — Tokio, Singapur, El Cairo — charting a six-hundred-mile-per-hour journey from Honolulu east to Los Angeles. A roaring, frozen animation of a flight at nearly twice the speed of sound, *Vuelo Mundial* gently picks apart the magic of Hollywood, collapsing movement and stasis, the iconic and the generic. Does the plane mean the same thing over Katmandu as Ho Chi Minh City? Would it mean the same in English?

In 1966 Guerrero began his studies at Chouinard and would spend the next decade and a half in Los Angeles, working predominantly in photography, sculpture, and installation, at home in a group of conceptually oriented artists — including friends Jack Goldstein, Allen Ruppersberg, and William Leavitt — who, like Guerrero, were interested in narrative, processes of signification, and the idea of California. In a tone cool and effusive, he reels off anecdotes. He tells me how Goldstein walked into class the first day at Chouinard looking like Paul McCartney, and how he told Guerrero that all these bands wanted him to be their front man. There are stories from the Pacific Building in Santa Monica, where Guerrero lived in the mid-1970s and where Goldstein, Ruppersberg, James Welling, John Miller, and the Kipper Kids had apartments or studios, and the bar downstairs where he would drink with Guy de Cointet and whose owners, he says, were funneling money to the IRA.

As it did for many of these artists, Los Angeles — home of the culture industry and already-faltering fantasies of the boom years — made a rich subject for Guerrero in the 1970s, appearing sometimes in his work as a dreamscape of mediation and cliché. Take, for example, a couple of composite photographs: there is deadpan humor to the simple sci-fi effects of *U.F.O.L.A.* (1973), in which he inserted a flying saucer made of hubcaps into the sky above the construction sites of Grand Avenue, and *Menu of the Future* (1976), where he added a “2” to the price of each item on the menu at a Santa Monica coffee shop. Notwithstanding the dystopian vision of a twenty-one-dollar tuna sandwich, these works satirize California’s mythology of progress while historicizing the present (*U.F.O.L.A.* documents the ongoing urban renewal project on the ashes of the working-class neighborhood of Bunker Hill). One can hear echoes of, say, Ruppersberg’s *Greetings from L.A.* (1972) or Leavitt’s tableaux in Guerrero’s presentation of the city with a mingling of fact and fiction, the banal and the strange. But whereas Leavitt’s and Ruppersberg’s interest in a Southern California vernacular focused on popular and material culture or the region’s built environment, Guerrero, in a work like *Four Obscene Hand Gestures with Spanish Translations* (1973), approaches the subject, if you will, through a different neighborhood. A set of photograms of the artist’s hands performing insults from the repertoire of Mexican-American gestural slang, each accompanied by a caption — *mamame la verga, chinga tu madre — Four Obscene Hand Gestures*, from the perspective of an anglophone audience, leaves the translations “half-translated.” Art’s extraction and application of vernacular material relies on the assumption that the viewer can adequately decode these things. Highlighting the workings and limits of these assumptions, Guerrero grafts elements of a Chicano vernacular onto a spoof of assumptions from an earlier age — the hand of the artist and the gesture as a mark into which we read meaning.

Raul Guerrero, *Rotating Yaqui Mask*, 1974



Raul Guerrero, *Marco Polo Restaurant: Menu of the Future*, 1976

Guerrero’s exhibition history from these years looks not unlike those of his Pacific Building colleagues, all still in the early phases of their careers, including shows at Cirrus Gallery, the Long Beach Museum of Art, and the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, then the city’s premiere venue for experimental art. His resume then diverges from theirs — quite of few of his friends going on to achieve financial and critical success in varying measures. Though Guerrero has continued to exhibit when he can, it has generally been at out-of-view venues, often around San Diego, where he has lived since 1980. Even as that period in Los Angeles art, in particular the group of artists of which he was a part, has become a subject of increasing art-historical interest, these accounts typically exclude Guerrero. Though he doesn’t dwell on it, the question of this divergence and exclusion is unavoidable, as is the conclusion that, at least in part, it has to do with the experiences and subject position that inflect his art. Or perhaps the ways that they inflect it. If a Chicano conceptualism (a term that anyway only captures a portion of his output from the 1970s) was a tough sell in its own right, the irony, playfulness, even capriciousness in Guerrero’s work made it altogether unmanageable, out of step as well with the expectations of what would come to be enshrined under the banner of *identity politics*.

Since the mid-1980s Guerrero has worked predominantly in painting. It’s a postmodern medley of styles, historical pastiche, kitsch indulgences, and freely appropriated imagery —Velázquez, Mexican cinema, George Catlin’s nineteenth-century portraits of Plains Indians. At first, he often worked within the scope of discreet and defined series. In the Oaxaca paintings, from 1985, he draws both from Surrealism and colonial Mexican painting to create a night world of jungle scenes, a pre-Columbian fantasia. The strippers and bars in the series “Aspects of the Nightlife in Tijuana” (1991) Guerrero renders in a florid decorative manner reminiscent of Raoul Dufy. Then, in 1991 he inaugurated a project that was supposed to take three years to complete. He is still working on it today. Titled *Los problemas y secretos maravillosos de las indias* — a title borrowed from Juan de Cárdenas’s sprawling 1591 study of the New World — Guerrero’s project is concerned with nothing

less than the history of the Americas from the conquest to the present. Not so much a series as a series of series, the problemas y secretos offers a parallax history focused on three regions of unequal sizes — the Great Plains, Latin America, and Southern California. It’s a long, lopsided triangle that provides a frame for the restlessness and exuberance of Guerrero’s painting as he works out the endless variations on a historical narrative comprised of quotation and illustration — from the chronicles of the Spanish to accounts of CIA treachery in Latin America. For the history of the continent is, for Guerrero, the history of the ways — and vantages from which — that story gets told and retold.

The first time I visited Guerrero at his studio, two years ago, *The Battle of Cajamarca* (2016) was displayed on the floor: a group of maybe a dozen coconuts — a few real, the others cast in resin and painted — with craved faces and inset marbles for eyes. Staring up with a dead gaze from those quaint children’s toys, the heads lay upon an overlapping collection of Native American textiles and rugs. The title refers to the key event in the Spanish conquest of Peru in 1532. Guerrero employs the canonical name, though it was not so much a battle as the ambush and kidnapping of the Inca ruler, Atahualpa, and the slaughter of his largely unarmed retinue by Francisco Pizarro and a gang of conquistadors. Pizzaro’s deeds — like those of Cortez in Mexico a decade prior — seized the European imagination, in turn glorified over the coming centuries in texts, engravings, and paintings, a repetition mirrored, in a sense, in a dissenting account, in which the conquest — or genocide if you prefer — is revisited as a kind of originary trauma. With the cartoonish violence of those glinting-eyed coconut heads, Guerrero’s version is less a retelling than a consideration of the process of retelling, of mythmaking. His decapitated tableau unsteadies its nominal subject, mischievously combining geographically far-flung elements into a continental pastiche: the rugs are not exclusively Peruvian, but rather drawn from all over the Americas — Ecuador, Mexico, the United States. And like the coconuts, the rugs are a combination of “authentic” and “ersatz” — many of them tourist schlock. And anyway, they don’t grow coconuts in Cajamarca.

Raul Guerrero, *The Bolivian Jungle*, 2006

Corwin, William, "Raul Guerrero," *BrooklynRail.com*, July 27, 2018

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Raul Guerrero

By William Corwin | July 27, 2018

Raul Guerrero, *Mujer del Puerto*, 1993-1998. Oil on linen, 80 x 108 inches. ©Raul Guerrero, courtesy of Ortuzar Projects, New York.

Raul Guerrero is a pragmatic conceptual artist: he aims for the maximum emotional and mythopoetic impact using a pithy economy of means. For instance, *The Rotating Yaqui Mask* (1973) presents a fearsome devil's visage with authentic animal horns and teeth, attached to a small motor installed on the far wall of the gallery. A foot pedal activates the machinery and the mask begins to rotate on the wall. This simple mechanism is a substitute for the imagined fiestas, dancers, and choreography that drag conceptually behind the Yaqui mask as a not-inconsequential mass of cultural baggage. Yet the precipitous spinning of the grinning demon on the wall goes far in conveying a great deal of the disquiet, fear, and even horror of those myriad traditional performances.

Throughout the exhibition, Guerrero chooses to not interject himself into the paintings, videos, and photographs; instead he appropriates pre-existing styles of painting and vocabularies of imagery such as posters and religious imagery produced for mass-consumption by anonymous artists; stills from popular movies; and fonts recognizable from advertisements. This method is used especially in his work appropriating imagery from the romantic film *Mujer Del Puerto* for a work of the same name (1993-1998). Guerrero dispenses with plot and narrative, but he uses cinematic techniques such as mise-en-scene, radically alternating the scale of figures in foreground, middle ground, and background much as a director might do; and employing text so as to mimic the closing credits of a film. *Mujer del Puerto* (1993-1998) is based on the tale of star-crossed lovers in the 1934 movie based

Raul Guerrero, *The Rotating Yaqui Mask*, 1973. Ritual mask, motor with foot pedal, 18 x 20 x 15 inches. ©Raul Guerrero, courtesy of Ortuzar Projects, New York.

on the Guy de Maupassant story The Port. In the painting, a dramatically and vertiginously framed composition is overlaid with the definitive word “FIN,” implying a terminal and pejorative statement. The intensity of the lighting and positioning of the figures indicates a filmic source, and even without knowing that the plot is one of betrayal, destitution, and desperation, the artist’s explanation/verdict is clearly labeled across the front. The production studio is listed below “FIN.” In this way Guerrero tacitly informs us of the origin point of his inspiration—Mexico in the 1930s and thus lays down a historical context/reading.

Vuelo Mundial (1977), a three minute video, asks us to imagine a specific entity, in this case capital cities around the world, simply by showing the name at the bottom of the screen accompanied by the ideograph of traveling placed above each capital’s name ¾a stock black-and-white image of a propeller plane with audio of the motor. Even in 1977 this evoked the retro 1930’s golden-age-of-Hollywood scene change trick to show movement across wide geographical distances (think *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, 1981). We never experience any actual city or site, instead we find ourselves in limbo, somewhere between a shaggy dog story (a long arduous absurdist joke with no punchline) and an intellectual exercise which demands that we fill in all the blanks based on our own mnemonic capabilities. The video juxtaposes travel as a dream-realm of popular cinema with the reality of how impossible such a flight around the world is for those living in an impoverished developing country.

Ultimately, collecting a distinctively Mexican selection of signifiers on canvas leaves Guerrero in a no-man’s land between a vernacular non-political surrealism and conceptual painting. This is a not a pejorative assessment though, Guerrero’s Oaxaca series of paintings are an innovative direction in the tradition of Mexican painting, clearly inspired by Rivera, Kahlo, and Si Quieros, among others. For instance, a series of four paintings from the artist’s Oaxaca series: *Vista de Bonampak* (1984), and *Pre-Colombian Lovers, Desire, and The Pool of Palenque*, all made in 1985, appear to draw on the style and imagery found in the popular and always titillating series of paintings depicting the ill-fated Aztec lovers Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl seen in Mexican restaurants, bars, and homes. But gone are the muscled strapping warrior Popocatepetl and his deceased buxom princess Iztaccihuatl. Instead Guerrero has created a series of visual assemblages of details of ocelots, frogs, palm fronds and waterfalls drawn or inspired by the quotidian love story imagery. The artist requisitions a few more specific objects; the Venus de Milo and quotes from Mayan wall paintings, to imply that though cobbled together from popular culture, he is angling towards a more accurate and de-mythologized representation of Mexican culture, by removing the hackneyed myth and working solely with the details. Without being didactic, the artist instills meaning and import with a conceptual artist’s slight-of-hand; there is no illusion or fakery, merely careful collection, culling and arrangement in the service of presenting the elusive idea of a culture. This perhaps parallels Guerrero’s own quest to understand his Mexican origins, as he grew up in California. But, by using the tools of conceptual art such as appropriation, quotation, and mimicry, Guerrero is able to explain cultural circumstances and rectify colonial mythologizing utilizing many of the objects and images that confused and caused those misunderstandings in the first place.

Schwender, Martha, "What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week," *The New York Times*, July 20, 2018, Section C, Page 15

The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By Martha Schwender | July 20, 2018

Raul Guerrero's *Mujer del Puerto* (1993-98) at Ortuzar Projects. Raul Guerrero/Ortuzar Projects, New York

Raul Guerrero

Through Aug 3. Ortuzar Projects, 9 White Street, 212-257-0033, ortuzarprojects.com.

Ales Ortuzar, a former partner at David Zwirner Gallery, opened Ortuzar Projects this year with an intent to focus on international artists who have not had recent exposure in the United States. His third show features Raul Guerrero, a San Diego artist who fuses traditional Mexican culture with conceptualism, video and painting.

The earliest works here are a series of bright, radiating and psychedelic watercolors from the early 1970s that depicts objects like a tea-kettle and kif pipe. Mr. Guerrero shifted into more autobiographical territory with "The Rotating Yaqui Mask" (1973), a kinetic sculpture activated with a floor pedal that refers to Mr. Guerrero's Tarahumara and Yaqui heritage from Northern Mexico. A slow, cryptic video portrays a shamanistic "Tribal Act" (1973), while a series of black and white photographs titled "Obscene Hand Gestures" (1973) documents gestures derived from Mexican-American street culture.

The most captivating works here, however, are Mr. Guerrero's paintings from the mid-80s to the '90s that mix Mexican folk art with tourist-market kitsch and the Southern California subcultures of surfers, low riders, pachucos, Beats and motorcycle gangs. The dark and deeply colored "Pre-Columbian Lovers" (1985), "The Pool of Palenque" (1985) and "Vista de Bonampak" (1984) include Classical statues, landscapes, Gauguinesque women and exotic animals. "Mujer del Puerto" (1993-98) features a heavy-lidded diva with the word "Fin" painted over her face, as though we are witnessing the final credits of a telenovela or epic film.

Mr. Guerrero's paintings recall David Salle's work from the '80s, but unlike Mr. Salle's more generic pastiche, Mr. Guerrero specializes in mixing iconic and ironic images from the Mayan and Aztec past with the mixed-culture, media-saturated present. Seeing his work for the first time now, when we need to be reminded about the fluidity of borders, history and cultures, is especially instructive and gratifying.

Jones, Mary, " A Multifaceted Career: Raul Guerrero talks with Mary Jones," *ArtCritical.com*, July 3, 2018

artcritical

A Multifaceted Career: Raul Guerrero talks with Mary Jones

By Mary Jones I July 3, 2018

Raul Guerrero, *La Mujer del Puerto*,1993. Oil on linen, 80 x 108 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Ortuzar Projects.

Since "Pacific Standard Time," the comprehensive survey of art in Southern California from 1945 to 1980, organized in 2011 at multiple venues, documentation of artists from that innovative and experimental period has been on reset. The early 1970s, in particular, were a watershed, as young artists emerging in the wake of the game-changing 1963 Duchamp retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum, turned to conceptual and performative practices the boundaries between them blurred. Some, like Ed Ruscha, extended the notion of object making into specific sites of investigation, the surreal nature of Southern California itself chief among them.

Raul Guerrero was born in 1945 in Brawley, California, and is currently living and working in San Diego. He was an active part of the groundbreaking scene of the early 1970s, and has continued in the decades since to contextualize the hybrid culture of Southern California.

In his second solo show in New York City, and his first at Ortuzar Projects, we're introduced to over 20 years of Guerrero's ongoing trajectory, from 1971 through 1993. That he began his career at a unique moment in Southern California isn't lost on Guerrero—this is the time of Chris Burden's most notorious performances, the 1972 Womanhouse of Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, and the work of David Hammons, Bruce Nauman, John Baldessari (his first teacher) and Doug Wheeler. Al Ruppersberg, Jack Goldstein, Vija Celmins, William Leavitt, and James Welling were all Guerrero's peers.

In conversation, Guerrero often uses the phrase, "by coincidence," usually in appreciation of the fortuitous events that marked his journey and aesthetic.

"Since I was a child, every summer my family and I would travel north and work as migrant workers," he says. "All the accoutrements we'd need for the summer, the pots and pans, everything, were loaded into the back of my father's flatbed truck. As we'd go over the 101 Freeway, from the back of the truck I'd gaze out at the Capitol Building, and think, 'Wow, this is Hollywood.' We'd stop and cook our meals right by the side of the road, and join the encampments by the Merced River, and suddenly there'd be so many other people, Anglos, Okies, African Americans, gypsies, Mexicans, and Mexicans from Texas. My aspiring family eventually became middle class, and at 16, I'm lying under a vineyard, wondering, what I'm going to do with my life? I hitchhike down to Mexico City and 4 years later I'm in Chouinard Art Institute. On the first day of class, I found myself sitting next to Jack Goldstein. Can you imagine? He looked just like Paul McCartney, and we became close friends."

Raul Guerrero, *Baja 03B*, 1972 (printed 2016). Gelatin Silver print, 8 x 8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Ortuzar Projects.

At the Chouinard, which later became part of CalArts, Guerrero understood Duchamp's work instantly and found it liberating, the essential foundation of his aesthetic philosophy. Not only was he drawn to the concept of the assisted readymade, but also to the subliminal power of a single, iconic object or image. This, for Guerrero, resonated with another influence—Carl Jung's theories of archetype and the collective unconscious.

Among the 46 pieces in the exhibition, the earliest are Guerrero's Moroccan watercolors from 1971, shown here for the first time. These come with the intriguing backstory that sparked their creation. At the suggestion of his friend and mentor Ed Kienholz, Guerrero sold all his belongings and headed to Europe. "By coincidence" (again) he managed to meet everyone right away: sitting next to Francis Bacon at dinner in London, he meets Lee Miller, (Man Ray's model and muse), and meets his idol, Richard Hamilton, and this is just the first week. He ventures down to Morocco, and soon was living on a few dollars a day in El Ksar Seghir, a small village outside of Tangier. The series of watercolors are intimately sized, as they were created to be postcards for his girlfriend. He shares the dazzling ambiance in beautifully patterned, detailed, and hallucinogenic pieces in which teapots, tiles and other domestic objects with their exotic symbols and arabesques vibrate in talismanic bands of energy—reverberations from the local hashish.

Raul Guerrero, *Teapot*, 1971. Watercolor on paper, 4 x 4 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Ortuzar Projects.

After that summer, Guerrero returned to LA blazing. In just a few years he made significant bodies of work in photography, sculpture, performance, installation, and video. Each of these directions could have fuelled a lifetime of work. Guerrero is a gifted and emotional photographer, as evidenced by his California Sur Photographs from 1972. (He cites the Mexican movies of Luis Bunuel as a childhood passion.) These photos were his personal documentation of a two week road trip through Baja with artist friends. The compositions are effortless. Throughout his photographs, Guerrero's utilization of light is mysterious, otherworldly, and exquisitely tender, as in the ethereal portrait, for example, of his elderly grandmother, who seems to hover between the tangible and spiritual realms.

Another standout in his multifaceted career is the assisted readymade: *Rotating Yaqui Mask*(1974) is a seminal, declarative work. Guerrero describes this piece as a formal exploration of, and direct response to, Duchamp's "Rotating Glass Disc," but the personal choice of the Yaqui mask can be unsettling. For me, the psychic energy released from the mechanized spinning of this ritual object multiplies seismically in a fearsome way, the context feeling both taboo and dangerously displaced. Similarly, in his movie "Primitive Act" of 1974, Guerrero is squatting and naked among rocks and shrubs, reenacting the primitive discovery of fire.

Seeking a more subjective, and pliable medium, since the 1980s Guerrero has focused on oil painting. Among those on view are four selections from his Oaxaca series from 1984 plus *La Mujer of the Puerto* from 1993. The Oaxaca series was done on location and, like the Moroccan watercolors, he entrenches himself in the history and culture of this particular place. Guerrero treats stylistic representation like a local language and adapts a flat colonialist style relevant to his theme. Like many of the painters he admires —Walter Robinson, Neil Jenney, Lisa Yuskavage and Alida Cervantes — Guerrero opens the door to Kitsch and pulp desire. As if he is writing a detective novel, heembeds layers and clues in his post-conceptual approach.

Much of Guerrero's process involves honing his attention and allowing his emotional responses to connect him not only to his own history but to that of the culture at large.He interprets his painting *Vista de Bonampak* (1984) for me: "I want to capture not only what represents the place for me, but also a critique of the culture, so after visiting the archeological ruins of Bonampak, once a Mayan city near Chiapas, Mexico, I imagined a jaguar, coveted within Mayan culture for ferocity and strength, stumbling on the scene of the murals, depicting men dressed as jaguar knights, in jaguar skins, capturing enemies for sacrificial purposes who are also dressed in jaguar skins. Although I might question who is the most vicious creature in the jungle, I also want to make paintings that are interesting and beautiful.

"There's a lot that can be said about the brutality of the system, especially with our current president, but I prefer images that don't delve into it overtly."

After 40 years of structured study of North America, Guerrero has a new theory: "Because we're living on a continent that was occupied by indigenous people through millennia, and their voice has been suppressed, their culture, especially in the artworld, is changing things subliminally by gaining a voice though artists, one way or another. It's a philosophical and cultural virus that's spreading. For example, John Baldessari grew up in National City, like I did, ten miles from the border. Now, here's a major artist, he goes to Mexico and is exposed to all this stuff that you see coming out of Mexico that's really interesting, but in fact it's all indigenous culture.

"If you dig tacos, you're being affected by an indigenous culture. You're consuming part of that philosophical virus. It's full of indigenous material: tortilla, beans, corn, the way it's prepared—it changes the way you see your reality. What that reality is I'm not sure, but somehow that essence, that philosophy, is expressing itself nonetheless into the culture unbeknownst to us.

"In this encounter between culture and things," he says, "your sense of reality is shifted. Artists like Baldessari, who's making art about culture on a large scale, has had his view shifted, and then he turned all these other guys on at CalArts. Bizarre, right?"

Guerrera is planning a trip to the Amazon sometime later this year.

Raul Guerrero, *Vista de Bonampak*, 1984. Oil on canvas 54.5 x 37.25 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Ortuzar Projects.

Larkin, Daniel, “Tribeca Art Spaces Yearn for Love in the Time of Cholera,” *Hyperallergic.com*, June 25, 2018

HYPERALLERGIC

Tribeca Art Spaces Yearn for Love in the Time of Cholera

By Daniel Larkin | June 25, 2018

On the evening of the 2018 Summer Solstice, more than 20 art and design spaces in Tribeca stayed open late for The Tribeca Art + Culture Night, which is part of the River to River Festival, and what stood out immediately was how many spaces decided to explore the darker side of sex and desire, all with a critical edge.

Love in the time of Trump may be a buzzkill, as it’s often hard to enjoy a romantic evening as democratic norms are violated almost daily. All this is coupled with the past year’s revelations from the #MeToo movement, which are forcing us to reconsider social mores that encourage exploitation. We’re all doubting, ruminating, and wondering how to cherish one another in these dark times. A lot of us are looking to art to grapple with the social implications of these questions. To steal a page from Gabriel García Márquez, what does it mean to Love in the Time of Cholera?

Raul Guerrero *Desire*, (1985) (courtesy of Ortuzar Projects, collection Mary Donkerslot)

And in space after space in Tribeca, it was fascinating to see contemporary artists rising to the occasion — offering commentary on what it means to love and desire today. It was also intriguing to see organizers bringing voices back from the 1980s that we can now appreciate in a whole new light given recent events.

For example, Hunter College Art Galleries’ 205 Hudson Gallery invites us into the rainbow of the City of Angels, circa 1960–’90s, for *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA.*

A giant monochromatic painting by Mundo Meza, “Merman with Mandolin” (1984), depicts a stud of a merman. It was painted the year before Meza died of complications related to AIDS. It’s hard not to connect these bleak colors with how this plague darkened the gay sexual liberation of the 1970s. The artist’s sister, Pat Meza, was at the opening and explained to me that the exhibition really “helps to put the mourning aside and to celebrate his life now. It’s been 30 years.”

Looking at the entire show, it was striking to see the willingness of these individuals to invent a new language for their desire and love, even during the dark days of AIDS, which I think offers a lesson as we search for our own answers in 2018.

We all know that desire is often complicated and impacted by race. A painting at the Ortuzar Projects from the 1980s by Raul Guerrero “Desire” (1985) juxtaposes a woman of color with the Venus de Milo. Do we want to stay trapped in the classic white definition of beauty this painting forcefully asks? Guerrero’s entire show masterfully probes this difficult intersection of race and desire.

Venus’s son Cupid was also greeted with a healthy dose of irreverence at the Postmaster’s Gallery. Kensuke Koike had a show of mesmerizing cut out postcards and other manipulated ephemera. The urinating Cupid was a hilarious reminder that we shouldn’t be taking the classical past and its baggage too seriously.

Kazumi Yoshida also re-negotiates classical ideals at the Cheryl Hazan Gallery. Her series of gouache & vintage wallpaper

cut out decoupages recast the muses of antiquity. Here we have Erato, muse of love and erotic poetry.

So, let’s be honest, there’s only so much we can mine from old symbols like Venus, Cupid, and the Muses. And while it’s definitely one strategy to adapt them to a contemporary idiom, other artists are feeling the pull of more recent icons.

Who can resist Ziggy Stardust? At her basement studio on White Street, Erin Ko created this impressive stained glass window. His famous album *Aladdin Sane* was released in 1973 right at the height of the Watergate era. Maybe Bowie had it figured out with his idea to counter corruption with dark glamour?

Bill Travis offers an homage to Walt Whitman’s homoerotic poetry at the Soho Photo Gallery. The poets words were put up on the wall and then viewers could gaze down at little erotic queer miniatures in cases. This is an example of the set of blue nudes.

Iris Brosch, *Woman and Nature near Extinction* (2013) (photo by author)

Moving from men to women, it’s a bit more daunting to figure out how to confront the male gaze and the desire for the female body, especially given the past year. But contemporary artists never shy away from a challenge. And it was really great to see how they approached these paradoxes.

At the Untitled Space, there was a rich selection of video art exploring the body. In one work, Iris Brosch also took on the mermaid in the second part of her trilogy exploring the relationship between feminism and ecology, “Women and Nature near Extinction” (2013). This project was performed at the 2013 Venice Biennale but the videos are attractive and stand on their own. Brosch entangles women’s objectification with environmental degradation as subversive mermaids that bend the rules in polluted water.

Kensuke Koike, *3-2-1-Liftoff / Rocket boy* (2018) (image courtesy of the artist and Postmasters Gallery, New York)

Another strategy is to re-appropriate the objectification of women and throw it in the viewers face. At Lubov, the drawings of Manuela Soto indict the hyper-sexual caricatures of women circulating online. It’s a powerful moment to walk in the space and just think about the messages many young men take on board. This is how many of them discover their sexuality — secretly poking around the internet as teenagers in mom’s basement.

The other way to approach the female nude is to conceal it, and to deny the viewer full access. Patricia Beary’s series of nudes at the Soho Photo Gallery took this approach. Although I got the impression the primary goal was formalist, notably to explore chiaroscuro with special exposure photographs and custom printing. “Reincarnation” (2014) was haunting in light of recent events. Somehow the blur over the face felt like it was capturing the zeitgeist.

El amor en los tiempos del cólera doesn’t fully translate into English, Francisco Correa Cordero explained to Hyperallergic. It conveys not only the need for love despite a disease or plague, but also loving amidst deep sadness, anguish or depression, deriving from its etymological root of the medieval humor of choleric. We are not the first, nor the last, to live in dark times. What emerged walking through Tribeca is that we can face this bitter moment with irony, humor and guts, while pioneering new ways to love and support each other.

Guadagnino, Kate, “Eleven Summer Book Covers, Reimagined by Artists,” *NYtimes.com*, June 21, 2018

The New York Times Style Magazine

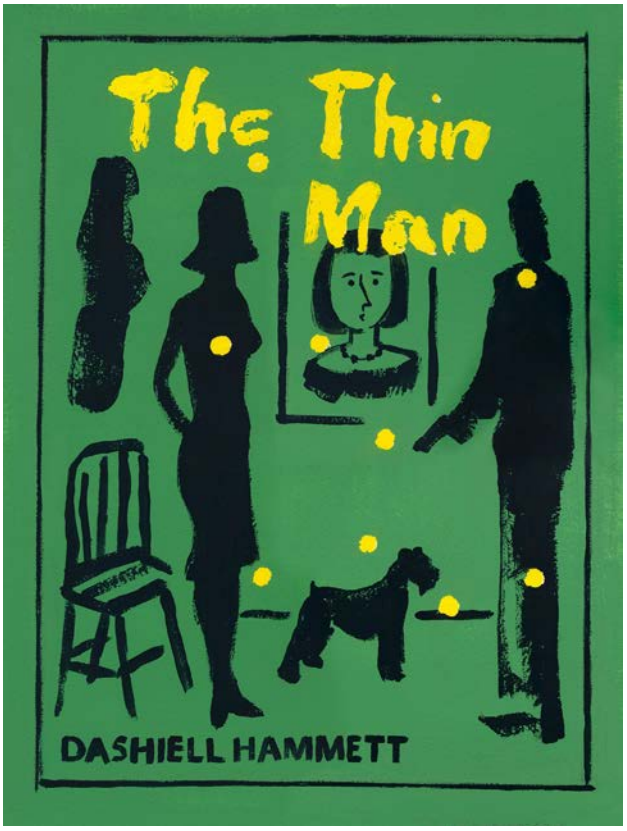
Eleven Summer Book Covers, Reimagined by Artists

We asked artists, including Tony Cokes and Katherine Bernhardt, to create new jacket designs for their favorite vacation reads, exclusively for T.

By Kate Guadagnino | June 21, 2018

There are generally two schools of thought when it comes to summer reading. Some see the season as a time to rest their weary minds with books that do not ask too much of them. We know the covers of these titles well: Rendered in mollifying colors like aqua, they do little but advertise their own breeziness. Others see summer, with its long days tinged with a sort of heaviness, as a chance to sit very still and give themselves over to the most demanding and long-deferred of books. “Are people going to read Proust and make a living at the same time?” Roy Blount Jr. asked in a 1985 essay published in The New York Times. No they are not, he argues, because they are waiting for the beach. But then what if, in addition to being a reader, you are also an artist, and find that other people’s creative work is not so easily separated from your own?

Here, 11 artists propose a new cover design for one of their favorite summer reads. While the selections range in genre, mood and seriousness — no one chose Proust, but you’d be hard-pressed to find any of these titles at an airport shop — most relate back to their makers’ practice. Though that doesn’t mean that their literary inspirations can’t be our welcome escapes.



Raul Guerrero Reimagines “The Thin Man” by Dashiell Hammett

“It’s a detective story, but it’s actually quite sophisticated and filled with fascinating characters. You have Nick — who has a Bloody Mary for breakfast and probably 10 other drinks by the end of the day — his wife, Nora, and Asta, their schnauzer sidekick. It’s set in the ’30s and makes me think of an America that no longer exists, although John’s Grill, a San Francisco steakhouse where Hammett used to eat, is exactly as it was. You know, mysteries are very similar to art-making. It’s about the quest, the attempt to resolve an idea. I included the double-faced portrait, similar to something Picasso would have made, to suggest deception — you ask a question but no one’s going to give you the right answer.”

On June 21, a survey of Raul Guerrero’s work will open at Ortuzar Projects in New York.

Behold, America! Art of the United States from Three San Diego Museums, San Diego: The San Diego Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Timken Museum of Art, 2012, p. 339

79. Raúl Guerrero (b. 1945), *Peru: Francisco Pizarro, 1524–1533*, 1995

Oil on linen, 34⅛ × 48¼ inches. Museum purchase with funds from the Elizabeth W. Russell Foundation, 1997.24, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego

Born and raised in Brawley, California, Raúl Guerrero possesses a distinctive and important perspective on the San Diego–Tijuana region. In talking about the region's inherent hybridity, Guerrero states, "In California much of my exposure to art came from the cacophony of images encountered when crossing the border, for example, velvet paintings of Elvis Presley, Pancho Villa and literary figures like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza."[117]

This painting is one in a series in which the artist evokes a nude figural form in order to portray the history of exploration. The dominant female nude is evocative of well-known nudes by Francisco de Goya (1746–1828) and Edouard Manet (1832–1883). The prominence of the figure and its relationship to the art historical canon make this painting an excellent addition to the figures section of *Behold, America!* In explaining the influence of the figure in his work, Guererro states, "I think my interest in figurative art stems from the way I was raised. My parents always listened to tangos and boleros, narrative musical styles."[118] The journey of Francisco Pizarro is delineated alongside the figure. The connection between the female form and colonization has precedence in colonial representations of America as a woman. In the modern era, Mexican painter Antonio Ruiz (1897–1964) portrayed a sleeping woman with a colonial town rendered on the side of her body in his painting *The Dream of Malinche* (1939; Collection Mariana Pérez Amor).

Beyond the nude figure, in *Peru: Francisco Pizarro, 1524–1533*, Guerrero portrays a variety of objects associated with indigenous Peru. By way of explanation, he asserts that "encounters with the artifacts of culture influence the way we see the world."[119]

Ma, Lesley, "Raul Guerrero's 'Oaxaca Series'," *Cue Art Foundation Catalogue*, 2009/2010, pp. 21-25

Raul Guerrero's "Oaxaca Series"

By Lesley Ma

This essay was written as part of the Young Art Critics Mentoring Program, a partnership between AICA USA (US section of International Association of Art Critics) and CUE Art Foundation, which pairs emerging writers with AICA mentors to produce original essays on a specific exhibiting artist. Please visit www.aicausa.org for further information on AICA USA, or www.cueartfoundation.org to learn how to participate in this program. Any quotes are from interviews with the author unless otherwise specified. Elizabeth Baker is AICA's Coordinator for this program for the second season.

On the southbound Interstate 5 past Downtown San Diego en route to Raul Guerrero's studio in National City, signs start to count down the mileage in the twenty-mile stretch to the United States-Mexico border. National City, one of the oldest cities in San Diego County and primarily an immigrant community, hosts the largest naval base on the West Coast, along with the Mile of Cars, one of the first auto malls in the world. After being greeted by the row of shiny car dealerships right off the highway exit, one arrives at a plain, adobe-colored industrial and warehouse complex, where the artist's studio is located. A plaque reading "Cine Mono Productions" sets the studio apart from the business-type storefronts next door, as do the oil paintings and the slide-laden light box in the front office, visible from the sidewalk. Inside, one gets the sense of a sanctuary, as neatly organized painting materials, stretchers, racks, and several large-scale paintings resting on the floor complete the contrast to the suburban material culture outside.

The visual landscape in which Guerrero dwells is a hodgepodge of images and influences. "Cine Mono Productions" playfully alludes to the patchwork of narratives and forms that underlie Guerrero's artistic endeavor. Guerrero

Ma, Lesley, “Raul Guerrero’s ‘Oaxaca Series’,” *Cue Art Foundation Catalogue*, 2009/2010, pp. 21-25

has been making large, ambitious oil paintings for more than 25 years. An important group of early works constitutes his 11-painting *Oaxaca Series* (1984-85), eight of which are on view for the first time in New York in the exhibition at CUE Art Foundation. The canvases, all approximately the same size (around 5 by 3 feet), incorporate a wide range of motifs — Mayan temples, the Venus de Milo, natural creatures, folk objects and lush vegetation. Situated in deep, painterly spaces in which saturated color and intense light interact, they create dreamlike expressions, woven together by personal interpretations of cultural confrontations and experiences.

As one may wonder how all these images came together, it helps to trace Guerrero’s footprints. Born in 1945 in Brawley, California near the border to Mexico, Guerrero grew up in National City in a working class family. His Mexican-American background included Tarahumaran and Yaqui Indian heritage. A short stay at Southwestern College in Chula Vista, near San Diego, introduced him to the experimental minds and teaching styles of John Baldessari and Robert Matheny. Later, at the Chouinard Art School (now Cal Arts) in Los Angeles, he received rigorous formal training and encountered a wide range of international and home-grown avant-garde influences, which led him to experiment with ready-mades and conceptual art. His contemporaries at Cal Arts included Allen Ruppersberg and Jack Goldstein. Post-art school sojourns in Europe included a period when he assisted Ed Kienholz with installations in London, Berlin and elsewhere. Subsequent adventures on his own in Spain and Morocco both nurtured and challenged Guerrero’s American, or more precisely Southern Californian, sensibilities, and fueled in him a sense of urgency to merge the diverse strands of stimuli that he had received thus far.

Back in Los Angeles in 1971, he began working with a repertoire of popular symbols and artifacts from his cultural background: a mix of Mexican, American, Native American, Southern Californian and Border. During this period, the mural artists of the Chicano Movement were active in Los Angeles and the Bay Area. Guerrero’s approach was stylistically and methodologically distinct from theirs, but his fixation on hybrid identity was a shared theme. His *Rotating Yaqui Mask* (1973) is a piece of motorized kinetic art that takes an ethnographic artifact and literally makes it spin. He also made sculptural installations, photographs and videos. This phase yielded works that show the artist’s exploration of the origins of art-making in various traditions. He playfully but critically positioned himself in the roles of both the indigenous artist and the Mexican-American outsider, employing conceptual tropes used by many of his peers in Los Angeles along with a range of cultural emblems. In 1980, he moved back to National City. To get closer to the social and cultural issues occupying his mind, he shifted his focus towards the world immediately around him, and

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abandoned object making in favor of painting. Guerrero went to Oaxaca in 1984 for six months to hone his painting skills, absorbing both technique and cultural material in the Mexican environs. The fruit of this personal journey was *The Oaxaca Series.* The paintings, which were executed after Guerrero’s return to California, incorporate in a new guise the raw, mythical energy prominent in his earlier objects and installations, evoking a suspension of time and space. A striking, elegantly poised jaguar in *Vista de Bonampak* (1984) averts its eyes from a faded mural depicting a ritual sacrifice; the animal exhibits indifference and fear at the same time. In representing the ritual scene, Guerrero emulates the style of the frescos found at certain Mayan archaeological sites, emphasizing his affinity to the ancient New World. *The Pool of Palenque* (1985) portrays an eerily hovering Mayan mask, surrounded by butterflies in front of a misty waterfall in a jungle. A mesmerized frog stares blankly into the void, as if frozen by a spell. The same sense of an invisible force lingers in *Undiscovered Chamber* (1984–2009), where three religious figural sculptures appear to be guarding unknown secrets while a watchful reptile observes. *Three Masked Men* (1984) alludes to a case of cattle rustling that ended with the lynching of three wrongly accused men, two of them white and one Mexican. The image alludes to a film, *The Oxbow Incident* (1943), which was based on a real event. Historical incidents of injustice or violence, which Guerrero tackles with a cool, objective tone, frequently figure in his work. Here, there is a surreal melancholy (along with a touch of the grotesque) in the scene of three hanged men, suspended in a row from thick brown ropes that descend from the painting’s top edge, the nooses functioning as prominent pictorial elements. While the men’s bodies are indicated by simple schematic diagrams, their heads are seen in startling close-up, faces concealed by garish, grinning Day of the Dead masks. Behind them is a scene of desolation: a blood-red sunset and a deeply shadowed stretch of desert with a black line of mountains on the horizon.

The Oaxaca experience emphasized the fact that Guerrero’s consciousness was already firmly structured by his Mexican-American upbringing and his radical art school education. *The Oaxaca Series* can be seen as a meditation of the impact upon the artist of a total Mexican immersion. Since then, Guerrero’s penchant for incorporating symbolic objects or situations to expose undercurrents in cultural history has often extended to more topical and explicit subject matter. Like so many of his contemporaries, he reaches far and wide for his sources and images, sometimes including photographs, words and maps, and making reference to the work of other artists. His figures often take on a loose and linear style. He looks across the border and portrays a sexually-charged Baja California club scene in *Aspects of Nightlife in Tijuana, B.C.* (1988–90), a series of paintings in which a sense of desperation for both money and intimacy permeates the crowd. Each of the six paintings in *Problems and*

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Marvelous Secrets of the Indies/Latin America (1992–2006) features a replica of Velasquez’s *Rokeby Venus*, the nude overlaid by dotted lines mapping various Latin American regions once subjected to colonial greed. Numerous colonial-era scenes, along with texts in Spanish, are scattered across the canvases. Guerrero’s fascination with social interactions resurfaces in *The Whaling Bar Series* (2003), a group of relatively small paintings that reflect upon a historic hotel bar in La Jolla. The setting and the faceless patrons, whose heads are substituted by clocks, are a clear homage to Kienholz’s well-known sculptural tableau recreating the Los Angeles artists’ bar, *The Beanery* (1965).

Guerrero has tirelessly articulated his position within the larger cultural and social context through a variety of subjects and approaches. His roots in the border culture provide him a vantage point to document both the local and the international. Executed more than two decades ago, *The Oaxaca Series* represents a decisive moment in the artist’s career.

The Writer, **LESLEY MA**, graduated from Harvard College in 2003 and subsequently received her MA in Museum Studies from New York University. From 2005 to summer 2009, she was a project director for New York–based Chinese artist, Cai Guo-Qiang. She is an editor of *Lovely Daze*, an artist publication out of Paris, and is currently pursuing her Ph. D. in Art History, Theory and Criticism at the University of California, San Diego.

The mentor, **LEAH OLLMAN**, has been writing criticism and features on the visual arts for the *Los Angeles Times* for over twenty years. She is a Corresponding Editor for *Art in America* and the author of numerous catalogue essays. Her publications include *Strangely Familiar* (Aperture, 2008), *The Photography of John Brill* (Kent, 2002), and *William Kentridge: Weighing... and Wanting* (Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2001). She earned her BA in Art History and Philosophy from Scripps College and her MA in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. She is currently working on a project exploring the affinities between poetry and photography. She lives in San Diego, California.

Freeman, Judith, “Mr. Chandler and The Whailing Bar,” *Raul Guerro: The Whaling Bar: La Jolla*, La Jolla: Atheneum Music & Arts Library, 2007

Mr. Chandler and The Whaling Bar

For years before moving to La Jolla, Raymond and Cissy Chandler had led peripatetic lives, moving sometimes two or three times a year in and around Los Angeles, always renting furnished apartments. In their thirty years of marriage, they moved nearly two dozen times. I think it’s one of the reasons Chandler wrote so well about Los Angeles---because he knew it intimately from so many different perspectives.

One might well ask, why did they move so often? The answer, in part, is Chandler was a restless man, constantly seeking new places to stimulate his imagination. The Chandlers were also very fussy people, constantly finding fault with wherever they lived. In truth, their sense of rootedness came from each other, from the self-enclosed world they created together, and the many houses or apartments they occupied meant nothing to them, or next to nothing, compared to their sense of belonging to each other.

The Chandlers moved to La Jolla in 1946, when he was 59 years old and his wife Cissy was 77. Cissy had always wanted to live in La Jolla. The Chandlers had begun vacationing in the charming coastal town in the late 1930’s, sometimes staying a month or more, until finally, with the money Chandler made from writing screenplays, they could afford to buy a house at 6005 Camino de la Costa, for the then princely sum of $40,000. It was a modest place by today’s standards, but it had a lovely bay window with views of the sea, and nice rooms that looked onto a central courtyard.

The house on Camino de la Costa was the first house they ever bought, and also the last. Cissy died of a chronic lung condition in 1954, just eight years after they had settled down in the seaside town, and within a few months Chandler sold the house and once again began leading a nomadic life.

He had been exceedingly devoted to wife, in spite of the fact that she had deceived him at the time of their marriage in 1924 and listed her age on the marriage certificate as 43, instead of her true age of 53 (Chandler was 35 at the time). Only later

Freeman, Judith, “Mr. Chandler and The Whailing Bar,” *Raul Guerro: The Whaling Bar: La Jolla*, La Jolla: Atheneum Music & Arts Library, 2007

did he figure out he'd married a woman much older than he thought. It doesn't seem to have mattered much in the end: he often described his marriage as “almost perfect.” It's ironic that the writer who created one of the most iconic bachelors in the history of American literature, the private eye and loner Philip Marlowe, was himself devoted to the domicile and worshipped his older wife. Over the years Chandler and Cissy led an almost hermetically sealed existence, with few friends or family to disrupt their private existence. Cissy, who was reputed to be high-spirited and witty as well as a great beauty (“she is irresistible,” Chandler once wrote, “without even knowing it or caring much about it”), helped keep her husband sober, cooked him excellent meals, and in general cared for him in every way. Her high spirits help lift the writer's own darker moods, and the witty exchanges his private eye Philip Marlowe became famous for were to some degree played out in his own marriage to the woman he adored and who he nursed lovingly through the abominable anarchy of old age.

Chandler lived only five years after Cissy's death---five very troubled and in many ways unhappy years. Part of that time he spent in London, the scene of much of his youth, where he had been raised by his divorced Irish-Anglo mother and attended Dulwich College (his American father had abandoned the family when Chandler was only seven and living in Nebraska). But a good portion of his final years were spent in La Jolla, in various rented houses and hotels. After Cissy's death, he lived on and off at the Hotel Del Charro. He also a rented house at 1265 Park Row, and later settled into a cottage at 6925 Neptune Place where he wrote much of his last novel, *Playback*, which takes place in a fictional version of La Jolla called Esmeralda and has many scenes set in a hotel modeled on La Valencia. That novel was published in 1957, just two years before Chandler's death.

His last residence was 834 Prospect Street, a cottage he rented from a woman named Mrs. Murray who he seems to have been very fond of. The cottage is no longer there. Like so many places, it's fallen victim to redevelopment. From his

Freeman, Judith, “Mr. Chandler and The Whailing Bar,” *Raul Guerro: The Whaling Bar: La Jolla*, La Jolla: Atheneum Music & Arts Library, 2007

residence on Prospect Street Chandler was able to walk to the village center, and often did so. The Whaling Bar was only a short distance a way, though it must have seemed a long journey to an ailing and lonely writer. While researching my book on Chandler, *The Long Embrace: Raymond Chandler and The Woman He Loved*, I spent a number of evenings in The Whaling Bar. It always seemed a magical place, replete with ghosts but fully alive with the present. It was the sort of place Chandler liked, one with a sense of the past, frequented by people with taste and class. He once said,

I like people with manners, grace, some social intuition, and education slightly above the *Reader's Digest* fan, people whose pride of living does not express itself in their kitchen gadgets and automobiles. I don't like people who can't sit still for a half an hour without a drink in their hands, and apart from that I should prefer an amiable drunk to Henry Ford. I like a conservative atmosphere, a sense of the past; I like everything Americans of past generations used to go and look for in Europe, but at the same time I don't want to be bound by the rules.

In The Whaling Bar, one could find such an atmosphere, and Chandler appreciated that. The civilized feeling exuded by the old hotel, the beauty of the intimate bar, with its authentic harpoons and pewter candle holders, the antique wooden shutters, the miniature paintings and display of carved ivory scrimshaw, and red leather booths provided a sense of coziness as well as a pleasing aesthetic. Even the mural on the wall above the bar, depicting a New Bedford whaling scene, originally painted by Wing Howard, must have amused him---that little piece of East Coast Old World transplanted to the new. I wonder if he was around when the blood got painted out of the water----when the wounded whales, pierced by harpoons, magically became bloodless in their suffering, and the roiled blue waters became unsullied by the dying beasts---just to satisfy the bar patrons who didn't like to mix tragedy with a felicitous hour.

Freeman, Judith, “Mr. Chandler and The Whailing Bar,” *Raul Guerro: The Whaling Bar: La Jolla*, La Jolla: Atheneum Music & Arts Library, 2007

Bars were something Chandler knew a thing or two about, having spent a good deal of time in a good many of them. They held a special beauty and magic for him, especially at that bewitching hour when they first opened for business:

I like bars just after they open for the evening. When the air inside is still cool and clean and everything is shiny and the barkeep is giving himself that last look in the mirror to see if his tie is straight and his hair is smooth. I like the neat bottles on the bar back and the lovely shining glasses and the anticipation. I like to watch the man mix the first one of the evening and put it down on a crisp mat and put the little folded napkin beside it. I like to taste it slowly. The first quiet drink of the evening in a quiet bar---that's wonderful.

Raul Guerrero has captured the feeling of this kind of bar, The Whaling Bar, in paintings that suggest both the present and the past, a rarefied atmosphere where time stops, people line up for a gimlet, or martini, or scotch rocks, and the world outside goes on, and on, unobserved. But here time is arrested for a while. I've always admired Raul's paintings, but I have a special affection for this body of work and its depiction of an iconic La Jolla landmark. Because it reminds me of Chandler, arguably the most iconic of La Jolla's many famous residents and also one of my literary heroes, a great American novelist who once said of himself that only he and Marilyn Monroe had managed to reach all the brows---high brow, low brow, and middle brow. That was his magic and legacy, this ability to transform the lowly mystery novel into literature and to reach across generations and races and different classes to capture his audience. And here, in this very particular landscape of the no-time, all-time, no-place and every-place Whaling Bar, Raul Guerrero and Mr. Chandler finally meet. I think they might have liked each other.

Judith Freeman
Sept. 26, 2007

Kamps, Toby, “Raul M. Guerrero, Problemas y secretos maravillosos de las Indias/Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies,” *Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego*, 1998

Kamps, Toby, "Raul M. Guerrero, Problemas y secretos maravillosos de las Indias/Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies," *Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego*, 1998

Raúl M. Guerrero:
Problemas y secretos maravillosos de las Indias/Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies

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Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego
MCA Downtown, July 26–October 25, 1998

Raúl Guerrero has been an important presence on the Southern California art scene—particularly in the San Diego/Tijuana region—for more than twenty years. Making paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, photographs, and videotapes, he has forged an expansive, ever-evolving vision—one that combines technical innovation with symbolic power. Although his style ranges from early conceptually based abstraction to recent narrative realism, Guerrero's self-described "search for the poetry of life" is a constant in all of his work. Traveling and reading voraciously, Guerrero continually engages the histories of culture in the United States, Latin America, and Europe, culling images and ideas for his art. Named for a 1591 chronicle of impressions of the unknown territory that is now Latin America by Spanish explorer Juan de Cárdenas, *Problemas y secretos maravillosos de las Indias/Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies* surveys the artist's career from the 1970s to the present.

Guerrero's earliest work reflects his experience at the Chouinard Art Institute (now the California Institute of the Arts) in Los Angeles, a dynamic school that encouraged diverse perspectives. At Chouinard, inspired by socially engaged Pop Art and movements emphasizing language and the unconscious such as Dada, Surrealism, and California Funk Art, Guerrero used photography and unconventional sculptural materials to explore the boundaries of art and his own identity. *Rotating Yaqui Mask* (1973), a mask made by Yaqui Indians native to northern Mexico attached to an electric

motor, reflects the freewheeling, hybrid spirit defining Guerrero's work in the 1970s. The artist, who is Mexican-American and part Tahumara and Yaqui Indian, uses contemporary electrical machinery to reanimate the mask, which he imagines was once worn in a ritual dance.

In the 1980s, Guerrero shifted his focus from intellectual experimentation to a more emotional, allegorical style, creating numerous paintings incorporating text and found objects, as well as prints and artist's books, many containing his own writings. In 1985, the artist, always an accomplished draftsman, decided to master a traditional, representational mode and spent six months in Oaxaca, Mexico, teaching himself the principles of oil painting. Through this medium, Guerrero expanded his ability to communicate his views of the world and to create complex symbolic images.

The extended series, "Aspectos de la vida nocturna de Tijuana, B.C./Aspects of the Nightlife of Tijuana, Baja California," begun in 1989, best represents the documentary strain in Guerrero's work. Aware that Tijuana's La Coahuila red light district would likely change dramatically as the city grew more prosperous, the artist set out to depict what he calls "the unique history, textures, and colors" of its bars and dancehalls. Like a modern-day Toulouse Lautrec, Guerrero roamed La Coahuila capturing the drinkers, dancers, johns, and prostitutes in quick sketches that he later transformed into paintings celebrating the district's lurid excitement.

By the early 1990s, Guerrero had moved to blending observed and invented imagery, creating allegories of the history of the Americas. The *Black Hills of Dakota* (1992), an image of one car jump-starting another in a desolate landscape underneath a cloud formation resembling a herd of stampeding buffalo, commemorates a chance meeting with two Native American women and their children near the site of the Wounded Knee massacre on a driving trip through South Dakota. The 1995 series "The Conquest of the Americas," recounts the six major Spanish expeditions in the Americas in the 16th century by overlaying an image of Spanish painter Diego Velasquez's famous *Venus of the Mirror* (1649–51)—a female nude that Guerrero believes symbolizes the hubris of the Spanish empire at its apex—with the maps and traveling impressions of the colonizers as well as imagery of indigenous peoples.

Other recent works use imagery drawn from cinema to comment on society. *Petroleo en Nica/Oil in Nicaragua* (1993) conceives of the dramatic 1990 elections in Nicaragua—which Guerrero observed with a group of actors and musicians from the United States—as a B-movie, complete with a “grand constellation of stars,” including Daniel Ortega, Violeta Chamorro, Bianca Jagger, and Jackson Brown. And *Poco a poquito/Little By Little* (1993) reenvisions a well-known 1940 painting of a romantic couple by Mexican painter Jesus Helguera as the closing credits for an imaginary film, creating a sentimental memorial for an idea of Mexican culture, which—if it ever really existed—is being eroded by the inexorable Americanization of the country.

Most recently, the 12-painting work *Calles de Mexico/Streets of Mexico City* (1993–1998) places Guerrero’s experiences and acquaintances in the metropolis within a grand history. Each given a different volume or *tomo* number, the individual images represent locations along the city’s main street, the Paseo de la Reforma. In the series, historic figures such as photographer Tina Modotti and comic actor Cantinflas coexist with U.S. tourists and cab drivers to create a dreamlike vision of the life of the second largest city in the world.

Guerrero’s search for images, ideas, and experiences has taken him to, among countless other places, Managua, Madrid, Berlin, Tangiers, and an Iowa farmstead. An unreformed romantic, he instinctively seeks out the beautiful, the dramatic, and the tragic, stating, “Hatred, passion, love, a city, a continent—these may all be seen as iconic art objects.” Like de Cárdenas, Guerrero is an explorer. But the territory he explores is largely intangible. It is the tumult of history and culture clashes that have shaped the Americas and the globe during the 500 years since Columbus. The problems and marvelous secrets Guerrero reveals to us are our own.

Toby Kamps
Assistant Curator

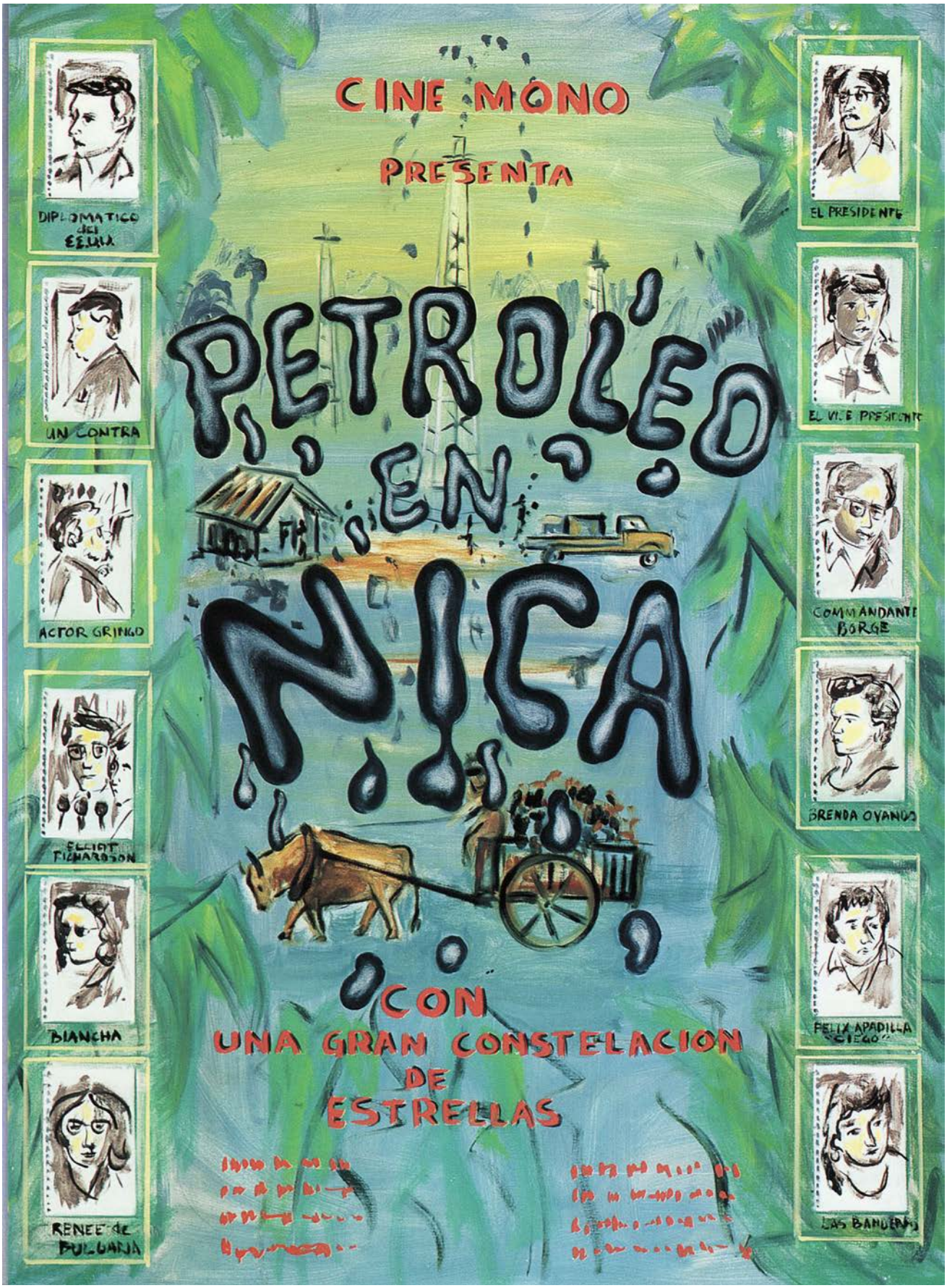
Kamps, Toby, “Raul M. Guerrero, Problemas y secretos maravillosos de las Indias/Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies,” *Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego*, 1998

Black Hills of Dakota, 1992
oil on linen
52 x 74 in.
Collection Dr. Celia Falicov

Cover.
Reign of Gold, 1992
78 x 60 in.
Collection Carol Randolph and Bob Caplan

Back cover.
Petroleo en Nica, 1993
oil on linen
77 x 60 in.
Collection Sandy and Arthur Levinson

Kamps, Toby, “Raul M. Guerrero, Problemas y secretos maravillosos de las Indias/Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies,” *Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego*, 1998



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The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
March 1994

XICANO RICORSO: A THIRTY YEAR RETROSPECT FROM AZTLAN

March 17 - May 15, 1994

An exhibition of videotapes made by Chicano artists over the last thirty years opens at The Museum of Modern Art on March 17, 1994. **XICANO RICORSO: A THIRTY YEAR RETROSPECT FROM AZTLAN**, on view through May 15, includes political documentaries, narrative videos, and experimental works. The program features a new generation of video artists who have emerged as the inheritors of the Chicano identity movement of the 1960s, and who use a variety of technical and critical strategies to explore issues of human rights and social justice.

Highlights of the exhibition include Evelina Fernandez's *How Else am I Supposed to Know that I'm Alive?* (1993), a story of two middle-aged Chicanas who must deal with an unexpected pregnancy; Ernesto Palomino's *My Trip in a '52 Ford* (1963), a portrait of the alternative life-style in post-Beat San Francisco; Yolanda López's *When You Think of Mexico: Commercial Images of Mexico* (1986), which investigates negative representations of the Chicano community over the past three decades; and Cheryl Quintana Leader's *Tanto Tiempo* (1993), about growing up in the suburbs as the child of a mixed marriage.

XICANO RICORSO: A THIRTY YEAR RETROSPECT FROM AZTLAN was organized by artist Armando Rascón in collaboration with Barbara London, associate curator, and Sally Berger, curatorial assistant, Department of Film and Video, The Museum of Modern Art.

* * *

For further information, contact Andrew Lakoff, film press intern, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9752. No. 10

Ollman, Leah, “Artist’s Stardom Didn’t Come Out of Nowhere : Art: Raul Guerrero, who calls himself a ‘working-class artist,’ has long been known in San Diego. But his fame is growing and now includes a spread in ‘Vanity Fair’,” *LATimes.com*, November 21, 1989

Los Angeles Times

Artist’s Stardom Didn’t Come Out of Nowhere : Art: Raul Guerrero, who calls himself a “working-class artist,” has long been known in San Diego. But his fame is growing and now includes a spread in “Vanity Fair.”

By Leah Ollman | November 21, 1989

SAN DIEGO — He is modest, serious, private--not the kind of person you’d expect to see on the glossy pages of “Vanity Fair.” But there he was last month, peeking out among the perfume ads and gossip, under the headline, “Hot Paints.”
Now that the art world has become hopelessly star-struck, perhaps the magazine was a good place for local artist Raul Guerrero to be seen. His Los Angeles dealer thinks so. Guerrero, mildly allergic to marketing strategies and hype, just smiles.

“I’m a working-class artist,” he said in a recent interview at his San Diego home and studio. “I’m in a situation where I need to make a living off my art, to continue my artistic quest.”

That quest, begun in the late 1960s in Los Angeles, where he attended the legendary Chouinard Art School, has gradually but steadily assumed the characteristics of a successful career. Guerrero’s third one-person show at Los Angeles’ Saxon-Lee Gallery opened last month and continues through Nov. 25. He is one of 13 artists--and the only one living outside the L.A. area--featured in the inaugural exhibit at Pasadena’s Armory Center for the Arts (through Jan. 31).

The current issue of the art quarterly, “Visions” carries a statement by Guerrero in its special section on multiculturalism and the arts. And next year, a fountain designed by the artist will be unveiled as part of the Hope Street redevelopment project commissioned by the city of Los Angeles. Other participants include architect Frank Gehry and artist David Hockney.

Guerrero’s work is, indeed, “ *caliente* ,” as Karen Smith exclaims in “Vanity Fair.” But the artist, 44, is no overnight sensation. He has had nearly 20 solo exhibitions in San Diego, Los Angeles and elsewhere since his first show in

1974 and a healthy dose of attention from the press as well. One critic dismissed the inverted pyramid, flying saucer hubcaps, rotating Indian mask and other symbolic constructions in his first show as “irritatingly hip.” Others since have labeled his photographs, paintings and constructions mysterious, disturbing, vital, intriguing, timeless, gentle, ironic and haunting.

Despite the extreme permutations in style that his work has shown, varying from severe conceptualism to lyrical romanticism, Guerrero said he has been following the same line of thought for the last 15 years. He’s searching, he said, for a poetic reality that exists between an object or situation and the person perceiving it.

“To illustrate reality is, in itself, not significant enough to achieve a level of poetics,” he said. “There’s a moment when you enter that realm, a transitory zone between fiction, what you imagine and what you perceive, based on your entire contextual history, your background, education, what conditions you to see.”

Guerrero’s interest in reconciling reality and fiction surfaces in perhaps its most accessible form in his paintings of the last few years. The suite, “Reflections on the Life and Times of a Venetian Jewess,” conveys Guerrero’s impressions of the textures, light and color of the Italian city as much as it restates certain cliches about the place, stemming from “what Hollywood fed me, what I read in books.” The melange of expectations he brings to a place, he said, are as tangible as the direct sensations experienced there.

The Venetian series launched a trilogy, whose second part is the current series, “Aspectos de la Vida Nocturna en Tijuana B.C. (Aspects of the Night Life in Tijuana B.C.).” Each of these environments required a different attitude, he said.

“I set out to do places that were exotic, romantic, that offered the possibility of color, places that were a celebration of life, places that I had an affinity for.”

Venice, he said, is “part of our collective knowledge as one of the grand cities of the world,” while the bars and clubs of Tijuana summon more personal memories. Painting this series “was part of re-experiencing what I had done as a teen-ager, as a rite of passage, to go down to the Blue Fox.”

Guerrero still sees work ahead for the Tijuana series, which was shown locally at the David Zapf Gallery and is now on view at Saxon-Lee in Los Angeles, but his third destination is already set: Iowa.

“It’s part of my cultural heritage, since I was brought up in the U.S. It affected my psyche, because many of the dreams lived out in Southern California originated in the Midwest.”

Though he has never been there, he expects his visit will be like “going back and delving into the historical side of myself.”

Each of the locales Guerrero chooses poses a different structural problem, he said, and each calls for a different solution. An earlier series based on a stay in Mexico related to the “magic realism” of such Latin American authors as Gabriel Garcia Marquez in its combination of the imaginary and the concrete. The current trilogy draws comparisons in style to the loose, buoyant brush strokes of Matisse and the color-saturated romanticism of Delacroix.

Fundamental to all of his work, however, is a curiosity about symbols, myths and the cultural archetypes that strike deep in the viewer’s unconscious. His passionate pursuit of these essential symbols led artist Ed Ruscha, who collects Guerrero’s work, to believe that “he has some demons haunting him and he lets them out in his work.”

Guerrero chuckled at the thought, then quickly sifted the comment for insights.

“I had never thought about it like that, and I think he’s right. But I think he missed the angels hovering around me. I think what he meant was that I’m obsessed by it. I’m totally captivated by the creative act, the creative pursuit. I think about it all the time.”

Pincus, Robert L., "Raul Guerrero at Kuhlenschmidt," *Art in America*, February 1986

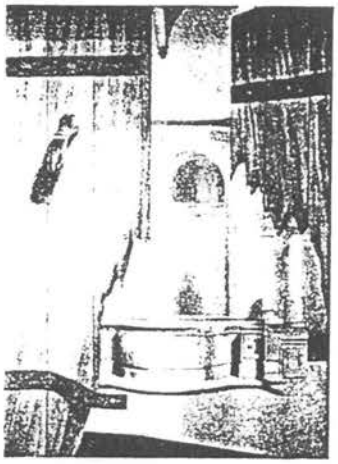
Art In America, February 1986

LOS ANGELES

Raul Guerrero at Kuhlenschmidt

The images in Raul Guerrero's recent oil paintings (all 1985) are highly realistic renderings of unreal scenes and events. Taken one way, they are like mystical visions: windows on a world which defies natural laws. Yet they cast an ironic eye on the view from these windows, since there is a large element of visual cliché in Guerrero's work. *The Pool of Palenque* evokes the sensibility of Disney's *Fantasia* even as it manifests a yearning for genuine religiosity. Surrounded by brightly colored butterflies, a fourth-century Mayan mask floats in mid-air while a frog noncommittally observes its defiance of gravity. In *Undiscovered Chamber*, the three small Zapotec figurines gathered around a bowl look more like living, breathing gnomes than stone relics.

Guerrero is best known for the conceptually oriented work he created in Los Angeles during the mid to late '70s. In these recent paintings he returned to the concerns of a 1979 installation for the gallery of the Claremont Graduate School, in which he recreated, among other things, the bird whistles made by early California Native Americans. The whistles were hooked up to play continuously, and a Yaqui Devil Mask, often used by Native Americans in performed rituals, was made to revolve continuously in a circular fashion.



Raul Guerrero: *Vista de Bonampak*, 1985, oil on canvas, 4 by 5 feet; at Kuhlenschmidt.

The recent work exudes a similar fascination with aboriginal culture of the Americas, but shifts from a Conceptualist to a quasi-Surrealist approach. Yet even though Guerrero uses an illustrative mode of picture-making indebted to Dali and Magritte, he remains true to his Conceptualist origins. *Desire* pictures a warehouse of objects from various epochs in art history. In the foreground, a Gauguinesque nude has her back to the viewer and the Venus de Milo looks our way; in the background, innumerable sculptures, many of them fragments of nudes, are piled up like so much detritus. The painting is less about personal desire than the forms in which art has represented desire.

Guerrero's paintings owe less to Surrealist sources than to conventional Hollywood clichés of the Surrealist style. The image of the levitating Mayan mask in *The Pool of Palenque* reads like a bit of cinematic hocus-pocus rather than a genuine synthesis of dream and reality. *The Last Dream* is an reality.

equally theatrical. It depicts partially destroyed wooden gates, adorned with a knocker in the shape of a human hand, through which we glimpse an unpopulated Mexican courtyard bathed in lavender light.

But Guerrero's emphasis on Surreal scenes, however self-consciously conventional they may be, hints at his desire to transcend cliché—his desire to find a pictorial vocabulary which takes account of the subconcious. The current work suggests that at some point Guerrero may be able to cast aside an iconography of kitsch-infused Surrealism in favor of a more directly visionary mode of painting. —*Robert L. Pincus*

Larsen, Susan L., "Los Angeles: Raul Guerrero," *Artforum*, September, 1985

Los Angeles

Raul Guerrero

Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery

There are no wildly lunging leopards, no tigers burning bright, in Raul Guerrero's rain forests of the imagination. He gives us tightly drawn, static relics of pre-Columbian Mexico, and dreamy, postcard images of sexual desire, but stands apart from them, as a spectator in his own narrative. Guerrero's images are stylized and commonplace: the ruined temples, dismembered statuary, deserted city squares, exotic birds, and jungle cats are like an illustrator's fantasy of ancient Mexico.

Engaging in a parody of Surrealist juxtaposition, Guerrero manages to drain this rich undergrowth of its potency. His sharp-edged, impersonal way of painting suits his program very well, yielding up little, if any, emotion. American born, Guerrero lives in San Diego, near the border with Mexico, the country of his ancestors. Many have tried to renew the same fund of imagery he explores: films, adventure novels, solipsistic murals, and other channels of popular culture are rife with the derelict remains of old Mexico. Guerrero has no such goal; he shows us how clichés falsify experience in this group of paintings, though he still pulls romantic strings along the way.

During the '70s Guerrero used elements of native Mexican culture as building blocks for his investigations in conceptual art. He explored ancient musical instruments, masks, and ritual performances for his work in photography and video. The archaeological element in his style and subjects provided a welcome richness amid the didactic neutrality of much art of the time.

The enterprise of the painter, however, is more declarative than analytic, even if analysis is its primary subject. In these paintings Guerrero functions as a conceptual artist, opening up a broad cultural and emotional landscape and then abruptly closing the door. His tight draftsmanship, featureless pigment, and smoothed contours are studied to the point of lifelessness. This contrasts sharply, however, with a group of his black-and-white ink sketches in an adjacent room, which reveal a rich, warm, bravura performance lavished—perhaps wasted—upon simple genre scenes of barnyard chickens and plants.

Raul Guerrero, *Vista de Bonampak*, 1984, oil on canvas, 62 x 43".

Passion does not need expressionist form to be legitimate, as Magritte demonstrated so potently. Passion does need sustained focus, even obsession; the light in the eye of the lover is required, not the cool, impartial gaze of the clinician. If Guerrero's purpose is to undermine the Surrealist concept of the marvelous, using the myths of Latin America, he has succeeded; but to what end, and at what cost to the life of his own art?

—SUSAN C. LARSEN

ARTFORUM, Sept. 1985

Larsen, Susan L., “Los Angeles: Raul Guerrero,” *Artforum*, September, 1985

Artforum

Los Angeles

Raul Guerrero at Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery

Susan C. Larsen, September 1985

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Los Angeles Herald Examiner

Raul Guerrero at Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery

Christopher Knight, June 2, 1985

Guerrero’s art comes close to B-movie mysticism

But his works rarely plunge over that dubious edge

Raul Guerrero’s recent paintings are double-take pictures. They don’t jerk your head around in a sudden shock of recognition as much as surreptitiously slip the rug out from under you, leaving your equilibrium momentarily suspended and floating. At their best, his paintings are visual conundrums in which a tone of conjecture, rather than conclusions, is sounded.

Remarkably enough, the artist accomplishes this feat through a kitschy veneer in which shallowness is all. A langorous jaguar encountering an ancient wall-painting, a pre-Columbian temple glimpsed through a lush and erotic jungle, a ruined door opening onto a monastic courtyard, an apparitional head surrounded by butterflies and hovering over a still pond – these and other Romantic images of a debased, pulp-novel sort dominate the show.

The imagery is orchestrated in a straightforward, iconic frontality, and is rendered in a slick, deadpan, uninflected style, in which no trace of the artist’s hand is visible. With their graphic look and often exotic subject matter, these paintings enter into territory that is perilously close to cornball metaphysics: They exude a steamy, B-movie mysticism of Aztec and Mayan hidden truths.

Rarely, however, do they slip over the edge. In almost every case, the paintings are composed from a close and precise foreground that presses hard against a background remote in time or space, like actors on a stage before a painted backdrop. Any suggestion of a middle ground has been excised. An abrupt collision thus takes place between immediate sensual, close-at-hand, experiences and the anticipation of a remote, far-off encounter. Perversely, that anticipated encounter is in an arena that is the residue of the past: The background images depict barren desert hills, colonial or pre-Columbian ruins, a waterfall in an ancient forest and the like. The legacy of a communal cultural history is offered as the destiny for future experience.

In this way, a sense of impending revelation marks these canvases – it’s as if an obscuring veil is about to be lifted – but they stubbornly hold their tongues. Guerrero plays on the familiar promise that artistic experience will change your life – and then pulls up short. The future tense is drained from these paintings, and in its place one finds an acknowledgement that the present is neither free nor unencumbered: it’s always bounded by beliefs tenaciously pushing their way into the foreground from the recesses of the past.

Belief, particularly religious belief, is everywhere suggested in Guerrero’s chosen iconography of ritual objects and symbols of birth, regeneration and

revelation. Yet the disclosure made by his strangely compelling brand of kitsch-conceptualism has more to do with faith itself than with faith in a particular doctrine. In these idiosyncratic (and occasionally very funny) paintings, be pries open and splits apart the comfortable reliance on unquestioning assumption that is the nature of faith. There’s no middle ground depicted in these pictures because that’s the space the spectator occupies. Between unthinking habit and unfocused desire, Guerrero seems intent on establishing some room in which to move.

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

BERLIN NEW YORK SAN DIEGO

IMPRESSIONS of THREE CITIES

RAUL M. GUERRERO

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

This book is dedicated to Dolores O. Mendia and Alberto D. Guerrero

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

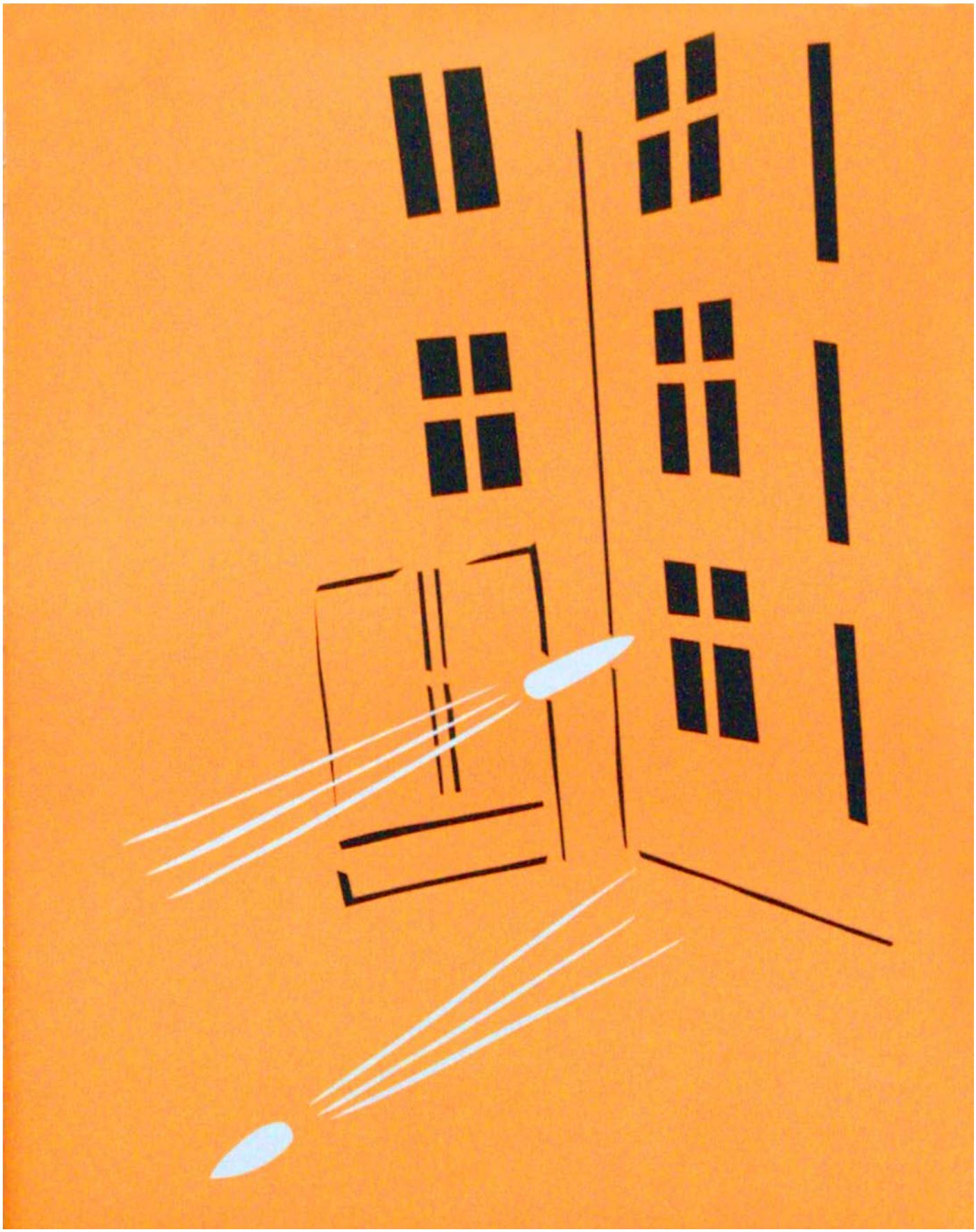
BERLIN NEW YORK SAN DIEGO

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

BERLIN

What am I going to do?
Must decide quickly. Fight for the
Deutschland, the Fuehrer, or save my life?
This church, thick walls that it has,
is the last barrier of resistance to the
Reichstag and the Red bullets are thick
as flies on a rotting corpse. Reinhardt,
Norbert and Seigfried are all dead. What
will become of Helga?

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10



Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

NEW YORK

Do you like this tie?
Yes, very much.
It's pure silk, just had it delivered
this morning.
Those red polka dots are very sophisticated.
I thought it would blend well with my
blue suit.

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

SAN DIEGO

Went to J.C. Penny's today. Bought
myself a chambray shirt, 65% polyester,
35% cotton. Going to wash it, put it
on, then to the Westerner, to pick
up a dolly.

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

Guerrero, Raul, “Berlin, New York, San Diego,” *Impressions of Three Cities*, Santa Monica, CA: Raul Guerrero, 1979, pp. 1 - 10

Printed by Century Press, Inglewood, California
Edition: 1000 Copies

Welling, James, “Raul Guerrero’s Installations, Photographs, Writing,” *Artweek*, March 11, 1978

March 11, 1978

Raul Guerrero's Installations, Photographs, Writings

James Welling

Santa Monica

The two installations by Raul Guerrero at the ThomasLewallen Gallery this month are both dated 1973. *Topografia* and *Cristales* reflect the relative timelessness of the artist's production as well as indicating a highly diversified body of work.

Topografia, in the skylit gallery space in back, is a body cast of the artist which is covered with a gray sheet. It floats in the room, ominously funereal. The folds of the sheet describe the shape of the body underneath as lines of longitude and latitude, hence the title. Guerrero has never worked in performance. *Topografia* is a performance work in absence. The document is the real thing. This corpse or sleeping figure theme is contemporary with other "dead man" pieces by Chris Burden and Jack Goldstein five years ago.

The adjacent gallery contains *Cristales*, a motorized kaleidoscope. You peer through a tiny hole at one end of this plexiglass and wire construction to look at slowly revolving gray and blue crystals in an eight-sided mirrorized chamber. The piece is hypnotic, simple and direct. In context with the sleeping figure next door, this becomes the figure's dream — a mechanized vision of elements coalescing and decaying, like a primitive film loop.

On the walls in this gallery is a suite of related photographic works, untitled circle, square and triangle photograms from 1976. To make these cameraless images, Guerrero placed, somewhat randomly, opaque shapes on photographic paper. Like the kaleidoscope object which is distinguished by its directness, the photographic compositions are *essential* photographs.

For the second half of the exhibition, beginning March 21 and ending April 1, the installation pieces will be replaced by new photographs made with a camera obscura. The relative levels of isolation and abstraction of the 1973 works, the weakest aspects of the pieces, are transformed in the new group. Using a public camera obscura on the Santa Monica Palisades overlooking the ocean, Guerrero exposed large sheets of photographic paper to produce negative images of the space surrounding the camera. What we see are Seurat-like perspectives, foliage, paths, cars, people sunbathing, playing shuffleboard, jogging in unearthly underworld brown, blue and black.

RAUL M GUERRERO: Camera obscura photograph, 1977, at the ThomasLewallen Gallery, Santa Monica.

This group of pictures unifies Guerrero's major aspirations. First, the pictures are accessible; they depict everyday objects and situations. Second, like the photograms, they reinvent photography. Third, randomness and abstraction are important compositional elements. Unlike *Topografia* and *Cristales*, these functions are not in the service of minimalism, but operate within a social framework. Fourth, the works express a visionary feeling which the best of Guerrero's objects and photographs tap into.

On March 25 the gallery will present four videotapes by Guerrero: *Nude*, *Vuelo Mundial*, *Circle Square Triangle* and an untitled work. Finally, a selection of the artist's writings will be published in context with the exhibition. I saw parts of the publication in progress, and the writing, short works of fiction, is very good, possibly the best work in the show. □

LAICA JOURNAL

October — November 1977 • Number Sixteen • One Dollar and Fifty Cents

I SUPPOSE SO.

FOR PAUL —

JOHN BALDESSARI

The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art

"The Power to Transform," *Galerie*, Fall 2020, pp. 68-73

A Dialogue with Raul Guerrero

David Trowbridge

The following interview centers around Raul Guerrero's creative exploration of what he calls the "psychology of objects." In an exhibition entitled "The Disturbing Object" (Long Beach Museum of Art, September 18 – October 23), Guerrero presents what is essentially a culmination of his activity of the past seven years. Our dialogue, for the most part, focuses on the work in that exhibition. This interview is edited from taped conversations during August and September 1977.

D.T.

1 "This bottle rack, torn from its utilitarian context and washed up on the beach has been invested with the lonely dignity of the derelict. Good for nothing, there to be used, ready for anything, it is alive. It lives on the fringe of existence its own disturbing, absurd life. The disturbing object — that is the first step to art."
—Jean Bazaine from *Man and His Symbols*, edited by Carl Jung

David Trowbridge: You have titled your recent exhibition "The Disturbing Object." What is the disturbing object?

Raul Guerrero: The title of the show was taken from a short paragraph that I read. It was a commentary that the critic Jean Bazaine made on the work of Marcel Duchamp. He was referring to how the bottle rack had been selected — the ready made. When you take it out of context, you can apply any meaning that you wish to that particular object. It's ready to take on whatever meaning the viewer wishes to project onto it. It acquires a multifaceted nature.

DT: Is it possible for you to relate, in a few words, what your work or investigation is about?

RG: The work that I do is about trying to present a key to the viewer's unconscious. The only way it seems that I can do it is to very consciously approach that idea and design work for it specifically.

DT: The idea of altering the object, of creating a disturbing situation using an object, has remained consistent throughout your work for seven or eight years now. During that whole period of time were you conscious of this as a subject matter?

RG: It's been a pursuit all along.

DT: How do you expect the viewer to respond?

RG: I'd expect the viewer, hopefully, to feel a sense of completion . . . of satisfaction . . . of totality . . . of wholeness . . . of self-containment. You can almost equate what I'm talking about to the idea of what the mandala does for an individual. If you begin focusing on the mandala, the edges of that mandala become extremely active. You have a centering device with a very active edge, and for some reason it seems to create a sense of balance or harmony.

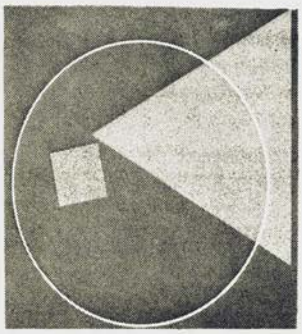
What I'm attempting to do is develop formats that are not literally mandalas, but are at the same time engaging enough that they can create this harmonious situation. In turn, the viewer will ultimately react very subliminally and have this feeling of euphoria that I feel can be developed, be elicited. It's presenting a key to the unconscious. That's the reason I use social images and universal images — like the circle, square, and triangle, or the bust of Beethoven — so that there's no problem in engaging the viewer. I try to balance it out by creating a situation of distortion and of abstraction. I'm trying to deal with the universality of man's unconscious. I design it [my work] to transcend culture, but nevertheless, use cultural images.

DT: You've selected several different media — photographs, objects, and videotape — for the Long Beach exhibition. How has this body of work evolved to its present state?

RG: The work that I've been involved with for the show is a result of several investigations that have been taking place for years now. In 1974 I made a series of photographs of objects on a table top, objects that had been collected from different parts of the world. They included a stone from Oregon, a key from Barcelona, a packet of pencil leads and a flute from France, and a jar of peanut butter from Los Angeles. I was thinking that it might be possible to combine different elements from different parts of the world in a random, but a very closed and tight system. That was done by placing numerical equivalents to the objects in a bag, shaking the bag, and drawing them out. I would then place the object randomly on the table. The table, incidentally, was from China, so it just added to the entire idea. Then I would make a photograph. What I was trying to do was to isolate individual aspects of the world and combine them into a new situation, ending up with a photographic image which would convey a very distinct impression. It was like inviting dinner guests from different countries to see what the subsequent fair would result into in terms of conversation. In a sense it's the same thing. You're combining auras.

DT: An object carries certain information with it whether we're aware of it or not. There's something uniquely French about the container of pencil leads, and something uniquely American about the jar of peanut butter.

RG: Even if you do have counterparts in another cul-



Raul Guerrero: *Circle, Square, Triangle,* rayograph, 8" x 8," 1976.

ture, it seems that each culture will arrive at its own solution.

DT: Design.

RG: Yes, a design and packaging that is very unique for that particular culture. It's the idea perhaps of magnetism. Everything has inherent qualities that are picked up in its surrounding environment. Even if you get flowers from South America, you have color that is extremely beautiful and very brilliant, as compared to flowers that might be grown in North America where the light creates a different type of format and form. Even design, resulting from a particular need and requirement in the culture, is a function of what that culture requires that particular item to be.

DT: How is that idea carried into the work?

RG: Well, there was one more step I should mention before we go on. The objects that I selected were utilitarian objects from different cultures. Then I decided to synthesize the idea and use elements that were more universal and readily recognizable on a worldwide level. In otherwords, attempting to transcend culture in a way. I selected three elements, the circle, square, and triangle. It was the same idea, but here I had variables of dimension and color. I made a series of color paintings and a series of black and white Rayographs.

DT: A great percentage of your work involves the use of objects. Even in the square paintings, you treat the circle, square, and triangle as objects.

RG: Right, the circle, square, and triangle were selected for their universality. They are elements that are basically used by any culture in the world. It was a means of transcending culture. It was also a problem I designed for myself in order to develop variables of placement of these particular objects to see what I would come up with in terms of an eliciting device.

DT: What do you want to elicit?

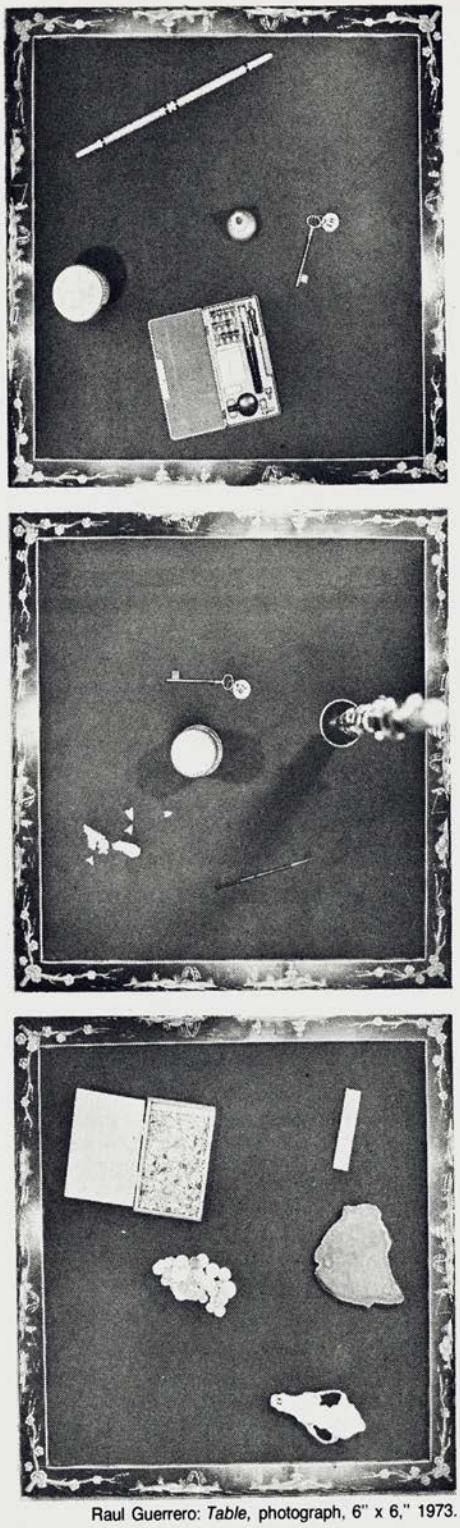
RG: I wanted to create a state of completion. I think the Rayographs and the geometric work became more successful. The elements that I used are all very balanced and static. The graphic arrangements that developed, as a result of the shifting and placement, are in a state of disorder. So you have a situation where you have order and disorder. Each combination differs from the other. By doing this, you allow the mind to immediately grasp the image, thus locking it into that particular image without any problems about identification. You eliminate the step of having to recognize the image as, let's say, a jar of peanut butter, which is cultural. Each geometric form is uniquely static. The arrangement is chaos in a sense. It's all subjective — the arrangement, the placement, and so on. It seems to me you arrive at a balance.

DT: You're trying to create "dynamic equilibrium," to use Mondrian's term?

RG: Precisely, Mondrian.

DT: Almost without exception in this show, you have altered or placed that object in a situation which is much like the earlier work that you were doing.

RG: This new work is a coalescence of all that thinking. Some of these works are objects in the same



Raul Guerrero: *Table*, photograph, 6" x 6," 1973.

fashion that the pyramid [*Inverted Pyramid* 1972] was an object. I was using a classical form — a three, four, five isosoles right triangle was the proportion of the great pyramid — and destroying the literal interpretation of what we feel is a pyramid.

DT: By hanging it from the celing.

RG: So that the point was down. It was a single object. The earlier work was all three-dimensional, but now I'm working in a two-dimensional manner. I am, again, trying to arrive at an equilibrium of balance where you have an image that you recognize, but at the same time it's abstracted enough that it becomes disorienting. So you create this dynamic equilibrium.

DT: You have altered objects in a number of ways. The pin-hole camera shots are negative shots.

RG: Right.

DT: But they don't come off as negatives. It seems that it's a very simple and direct way of altering to elicit a response. It doesn't look like it's simply reversed. The object seems to be emanating a certain kind of light, to use your word, aura. I assume that that's the quality of the pin-hole camera.

RG: It is possible to get a very precise image with a pin-hole camera. I was trying to strike a balance of identity and diffusion of image. It has to do with the physical properties of the process I was using.

DT: Would a pin-hole camera shot be different from the same shot taken out of focus with a lens camera?

RG: Yes, there is a tremendous difference. An out-of-focus lens camera shot still simply looks out of focus. You don't pick up the subtle tonal ranges of the actual light.

DT: There seems to be throughout the recent body of work a very conscious consideration of light. The pin-hole camera shots seem to be emanating light. The objects that have been coated with sand, to alter the surface — Beethoven, the tricycle — seem to be almost impressionistic, both in terms of the object itself and the photograph. The objects seem to soften at the edges, breaking up and dispersing the light in a very random way that flattens out the image, almost like a coarsely grained photograph.

RG: Well, there's no way to get around it. If you're going to execute an idea, you want to use whatever means are available to you to make that idea function in the best possible manner. In this case it was very necessary for me to consider the aspects of light in photography, to arrive at a proper solution for the presentation of the thought. I hit upon the idea of softening the contours of the object by using colored sand. Theoretically, it seemed it would not reflect light the way a glossy enamel surface might reflect the color. I really never know what's going to occur, but I wanted a focusing device and then a catalytic device. In order to do that, you have to consider that each respective way that I use to develop or present this idea has unique properties about it. I realized what the properties of the pin-hole camera were. Had I just shot the pieces covered with sand in black and white I would have arrived at a very flat image also. But in this case I wanted to interject the variable of color and embed it in a structural situation. For that I selected the primary and secondary colors. By softening the image and covering it with sand, I was able to destroy the edges. It wasn't a straight, crisp line. The physical object tends to flatten out the way the photograph flattens out. In a sense you are beginning to see a three-dimensional form as two-dimensional. They echo each other.

DT: With the photographs of the objects and the videotape, you're dealing with a complementary color situation. You have a very simple area of one color against a background of its compliment. You're creating a situation that has a very strong tension between one area and another area, but at the same time the objects are centered. There's a balance at the same time there's a tension.

RG: There is. The tension in the black and white photographs exists because of the auralike effect that the box camera picks up. They're already abstracted enough. If I had photographed the three-dimensional objects against a white field, I would have ended up with a color image against white. That wouldn't be enough to destroy the literal content. I had to embed it into another situation, and that is the color structure. By doing that I'm removing it one step further from its literal content.

DT: You destroy the commonness.

RG: To make it transcend into another area, but at the same time the commonness is what locks you into it because it's so readily recognizable. It's the same thing with the video of the female, except in this case I'm reversing the color situation and have the added dividend of movement. Now primaries are on her body and the secondaries are on the background. In that sense, it's sort of a play on the other pieces. Maybe it's like poking fun at myself, reversing the tables. In actuality the videotape is the most complete because it does have that element of movement in it. It's nevertheless a focusing device as it's moving.

DT: Your work doesn't seem to involve an identifiable style.

RG: The style developed in response to a particular issue. I'm not limited or territorialized by plastic means. The entire show is about the same idea, the same thought. How best to elicit a subconscious response to an image in abstract form. Abstraction is one of my prime interests. I consider these to be abstract forms.

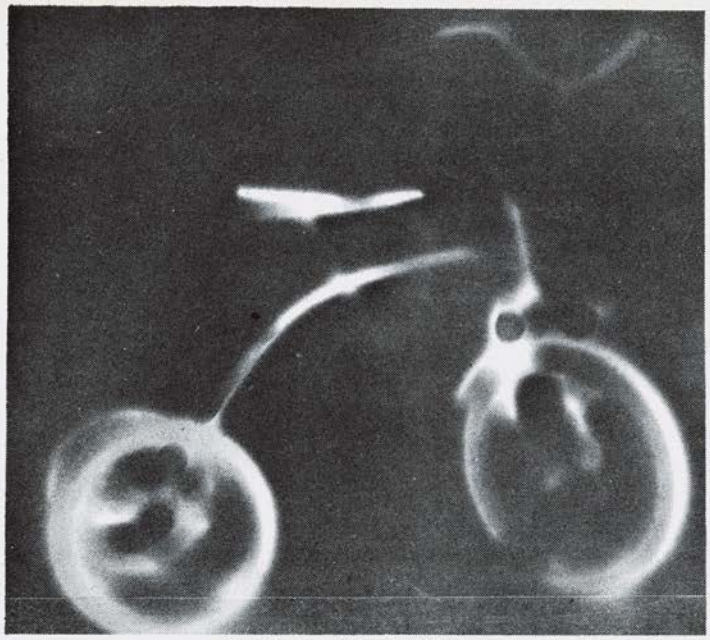
DT: You are not interested in showing a whole series of possibilities. What you're interested in are only those works that seem to take the idea to its most complete form.

RG: As much as possible. I'm interested in a subtle means of creating an enigmatic situation, and I think that is definitely locked into the idea of form and content. Everything is very structured, as a very good abstract painting is very structured.

DT: But many of your decisions have been made intuitively.

RG: Right. They come from a combination of intuition and theories that I have always been interested in.

Raul Guerrero: *Bust*, 17½" high plaster of paris bust of Beethoven covered with orange hobby sand, 1977.



Raul Guerrero: *Tricycle*, pinhole camera photograph, 8" x 10," 1976.

I would allow my intuition to be released in a structural format. I want the images and pieces that I do to really hit the gut level. Perhaps that is what art is about, that gut level response. There is a certain amount of consciousness that goes into each piece, but in totality I didn't grasp what was occurring until maybe two months ago.

DT: There is a deja vu-like experience that exists when looking at your work.

RG: Almost every object that I use is something we all know, that we all have references to. The graphics involved in order to depict that object have taken it out of context.

DT: The experience is between the art and the object as we remember it outside of art.

RG: It wouldn't necessarily have to be an object. It might consist of the colors that I am using. They are all primary [and secondary] colors — the most basic. It could be a sound that you have the capacity to recognize, although you have never heard it before. There was a piece I made — the bird bone whistles — that piece was dealing directly with that problem. Presenting to the viewer, and I include myself, a sound emanating from bird bones, a most primitive musical instrument. A sound that definitely must have taken place 15,000 years ago. What happens when we listen to sounds like that? Who knows whether that sound hasn't been passed on to us by genetic culture and biology? It's not so much the new composition that has resulted, but the fact that it might be possible to tap into the recesses of the unconscious. You might have a deja vu experience.

DT: Even though I think of the work as disturbing, there is a quietude about each of the works. I would expect that the work is going to have that kind of effect on the viewer. Not that it's not going to be interesting or engaging . . . it's going to be subtle, quiet.

RG: Its comfortableness that one gets from works of art that are really intriguing. They're so in balance and harmonious that they become soothing. A Rousseau painting is very, very in balance, although it has a lot of visual stimulus on the canvas.

DT: It seems that the term "dynamic equilibrium" can be used to describe many works of art that are stylistically quite different from what Mondrian was doing.

RG: I think so, particularly at this point. At the time he was speculating on that idea, it was necessary to enforce the idea of pure abstraction in a geometric sense, but that was because the idea was so new. At this point, after the experimenting that has gone on in aesthetics during the last sixty years, we realize that there is a common denominator for all fine aesthetics. It seems that you can almost consciously make an evaluation as to what that is.

DT: There is a certain kind of quietness about most works of art that survive time . . . engage us over a long period. Even a Pollock which is very energetic is at the same time very centered, very controlled.

RG: At this point I'm beginning to think it has to do with finding the rhythm and the equilibrium of a particular idea and thought, and being able to develop it in the most precise, succinct, and simple manner.

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