

Latin American Women Artists of the United States: The Works of 33 Twentieth-Century Women

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Linda Vallejo's titles suggest a strong attachment to surrealism. Her paintings focus on past dreams, memories and premonitions, although subject matter consists basically of matters of reality. Two 1994 renditions of *The Spirit of Our Ancestors* differ only slightly in each background. One witnesses in each the theory of interpenetration of human forms created by a series of vertical clouds. Cloud-like formations resembling human bodies appear to move forward and backward, creating abstract forms that delight the visual senses.

The smaller, 14 by 10 inch painting shows dream-like images of mankind, in itself a worthy and complete expression. The spirit of the ancestors in the overlapping, smaller linear figure sustains the lower portion of the painting.

It is questionable whether the single figure should occupy such a formidable location or whether the composition actually demands its presence. Aside from its location, two distinctly different styles combat each other. *The Spirit of Our Ancestors* is a strong and complete work without the inclusion of the linear spirit. The word "spirit" denotes a ghostlike image, and if a style similar to that used throughout the painting was used to depict the image of the spirit, the painting would appear more compatible with the viewer. In subtracting the image of the spirit from the painting, one would then assume that the spirit dwells within the series of overlapping and interpenetrating human forms in the background.

A similar analysis applies to the second version of *The Spirit of Our Ancestors*. The painting, a mere 20 by 27 inches, though larger than the first, is a thoroughly exciting spiritual image. However, because of its style, it appears as an afterthought, an image separate from the whole, applied onto an already completed work. Positioned higher on the frontal plane, it would appear more compatible. In both paintings the image of the spirit is transparent except for the outline of the figurative form, aiding in its incorporation of the whole.

Linda Vallejo's paintings are a part of the mainstream of American art. Her subject matter relates to an international theme, and her compositional approach is a personal one. The mood is essentially melodramatic with a combination of grays, blues and greens. Both paintings lack visual perspective because the entire expression occupies the frontal plane. The vertical images are viewed horizontally instead of from foreground to background.

Dusk, a painting executed in 1993, is developed into three horizontal planes. The surreal aspect is evident in the upper area of the sky. The middle plane reveals the intensity of the dusk, while the lower plane depicts the mountainous terrain. The sky displays the dream of a face identified only by features and not shape.

Viewing two eyes, a nose and mouth, the viewer is invited to assume the volume of the space that the face would occupy. The invisibility of the face makes for an eerie nightmarish image.

The image resides above the golden dusk and into the dramatic blue atmosphere and appears to be the eye of a storm about to erupt.

Linda Vallejo introduces parts of the earthly foreground into the sky to maintain a distribution of color throughout the painting. It also contributes to a unified composition.

Evil and Innocence, a 1994 production, is a universal theme, and Linda Vallejo's version is a personal approach. The theme has several variations under various titles and could range in styles from realism to abstract to pop to abstract expressionism and surrealism.

Since Vallejo is motivated by dreams and premonitions, one would assume her portrayals to be surreal. The lower torso of the innocent female is excluded from the nonrealistic composition. The theme itself, however, remains unchanged and serves as warning to those outsiders who may fall victim to such gross hunger and lust. The virginity of womanhood is the focal point of attention, surrounded by the lust of man. The male figures are grotesque and ugly. The image of the would-be victim remains mute and defenseless.

A dual technical approach is used to express evil and innocence. The latter is painted in a surrealistic style, while the former leans toward the abstract expressionist school of thought.

The greedy males appear as beasts with dagger-like teeth and terrifying claws for fingernails. There is nothing glamorous about Vallejo's work, but it does alert one to the evils of this world. It is the audience who must contain their evil desires, which, of course, reign under the guise of pleasure.

Vallejo offers a frontal plane in which the two extreme emotions occupy space adjacent to each other. Both emotions are composed separately as foreground and background, and as opposing emotions, the conflict succeeds only in theory. Prepositionally, the two emotions integrate into a single unit.

Another surrealistic approach used by Linda Vallejo is the disjointed and disconnected parts of the human body. In her 1993 gouache painting *Dreams and Memories*, Vallejo has human images floating in space. There is no anchoring of ideas. The artist positions a pair of human eyes in the center of the painting, suggesting a possibly invisible head form. It is common for dreams to be painted in a surreal manner, acknowledging only particular items and excluding others. *Dreams and Memories* is a recording of such a dream. Not only are the anatomical parts severed from each other, but the element of nature is introduced in the form of a beautiful flower.

In a letter to the author, Linda Vallejo offers several personal remarks regarding her philosophy and purpose in life:

The nature of my artwork revolves around my duo experience as a woman and Chicano living the contemporary lifestyle of the twentieth century and studying the ancient indigenous traditions of Mexico and the Americas. I have worked to discover woman in her modern and ancient place as a source of strength, love and integrity. I believe that all women are a part of the earth and can be inspired by relationships with and through nature.

My art images are dedicated to the image of women understood in the Chicano-Indigena cultural and spiritual concept. It is my belief that an artist must integrate their life's experience into a consolidated whole in order to produce an art image true to themselves and the message that they are to share with their audience. As a Chicano, I now participate in many indigenous ceremonial events throughout California and the Southwest.

I often use the image of the full face, with a background of trees, water, fire, and wind to exemplify the most precious aspects of serenity and love within woman. The eyes became the vehicle of these aspects of woman, coupled with the purity of the classical nude form. I have also completed a large series of woman's images surrounding pain and loss. I have selected the symbol of dismemberment to describe feelings of loss and loneliness, which so many women experience through the death of loved ones, dreams and hope. It is my firm belief that the woman is the symbol of the earth, and that each woman can learn directly from the earth the aspects of loyalty, integrity, honor, generosity and courage.