

Linda Vallejo “Fierce Beauty” A Forty Year Retrospective

foreword by

Armando Durón calls himself an “art metiche” because he has been committed to Chicano art in Los Angeles for almost thirty years. He is past president of the boards of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) and Self Help Graphics, past member of the board of the Latino Theatre Company, and a founder of the National Hispanic Media Coalition. An avid collector of Chicano art, he has organized numerous exhibitions and written several articles on Chicano art.

Notes from the Living Room Couch

FOREWORD

Artists in their fifties ought to be having mid-career retrospectives. But what about the Latina/o artists in this city? Why am I not getting invites to their retrospectives? I’ve only been to a few in the last fifteen years. I decided to do something about it: I asked Linda Vallejo to consider the thought. This exhibition, *Fierce Beauty: The Art of Linda Vallejo, A Forty-Year Retrospective*, is the result.

I’ve followed and collected Vallejo’s work for over twenty years, knowing that too often her work was underappreciated and misunderstood, even among those who claim to know better. Vallejo has been relentless, bold, and brave. Through her participation in indigenous practices, she quickly transcended the superficial mixtures of Aztec, Mayan and other pre-Columbian imagery without understanding context that often confused the work of other Chicana/o artists. Vallejo’s transcendence gives her work a much deeper connection to her indigenous roots. It is more meaningful and it greatly enriches her work. It is also one of the paradoxes with respect to her connection with other Chicano artists.

Throughout her career, Vallejo has recycled the images found in earlier works, incorporating them into the postmodern altars, books, collages, postproduction sculpture, and assemblage, thereby truly enmeshing herself into the environmentalism that she has also been advocating for many years. Vallejo is an independent feminist thinker who has been working on imagery that may parallel that of other artists around the world, but she has not had the luxury of artistic antecedents or inspirations that one expects in a linear art historical world.

Perhaps her authentic indigenous strand of Chicano artistic expression and her intuitive commitment to our environment are troubling in an age when everyone talks the talk but can hardly be bothered with the walk. The fierce beauty we see in Vallejo's work is the result of a singular creative soul that has patiently waited for we the viewers to catch up to. To understand Vallejo's work, one has to listen for the rustling wind, breathe in the earth, feel the sun's warmth, and taste the deep blue water. That may not be easy in this age of instant gratification, but the things that take time are the things that last. And after forty years of working at it, Vallejo has achieved a body of work that truly transcends her time and place.

I am proud to be associated with this project even if only in the planting of the seed that caused others to join in this great adventure. I want to thank Betty Ann Brown, the curator of the exhibition, as well as the other writers of this volume--Peter Frank, Bill Moreno, Gloria Orenstein, and Sybil Venegas--for their incisive writing. Most of all, I thank Linda Vallejo, whose work we are here to celebrate. It is my profound hope that we will inspire other curators and institutions to take a step forward and consider mid-career retrospectives of other visual artists among us. And I join in saluting Plaza de La Raza as it also celebrates its fortieth anniversary.